THE

SPIRITUAL WORKS

OF THE

Rev. John Gother.

IN SIXTEEN VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

NEWCASTLE:

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BRITISH MUSEUM

INSTRUCTIONS

ON THE

EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

OF THE

SUNDAYS,

FROM ADVENT TO TRINITY-SUNDAY.

(Lent and Easter Week excepted.)

A. No, I ought to mock nobody; for if any body be deformed, or mad, or foolish; this is a misfortune, for which I ought to pity them, and not mock them.

Q. But what if you see others laugh at them, and mock them?

A. If others do it, they do ill, and I must not do like them. God would punish me, and make me like those whom I mock.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE *AUTHOR.*

MR GOTHER, the pious and learned Author of the following moral tracts, was born at Southampton, in Hampſhire: His parents were rigid Preſbyterians, and brought up their ſon, as uſual, in their own way, with all the prejudice againſt the *Church of Rome*, which a tender mind, full of zeal, is capable of receiving. This we have from his own words, in his introduction to a *Papiſt Miſrepreſented and Repreſented*, page 12, where he writes thus: "*In drawing out the character of the Papiſt Miſrepreſented, I have quoted no Authors, but have deſcribed him exactly according to the apprehenſion I had of a Papiſt, framed by me when I was a Proteſtant.*" But though his judgment and underſtanding laboured thus for ſeveral years under the prejudice of education, his heart was always ſincere, and he embraced the truth as ſoon as it was clearly manifeſted to him.

Almighty God having deſigned him for an inſtrument of his mercies to many ſinful and deluded ſouls, in order to qualify him duly for that ſacred employment, diſpoſed things ſo, by a long chain of providential events, that by means of a Catholic relation, he was ſent over to the Engliſh college at Liſbon; where his excellent natural parts ſoon diſtinguiſhed him, and convinced the ſuperiors of that learned community, that Providence had made them a preſent of a youth, who would one day be its greateſt ornament. But ſince wit and learning are dangerous qualifications, if not accompanied with ſolid virtue; what contributed moſt to cultivate this advantageous opinion of him, was the uniform and ſteady regularity of his conduct during the whole time of his reſidence in that college, where he advanced by equal ſteps in virtue and learning, and gained the love and eſteem of all that were eye-witneſſes of his behaviour. In common converſation he was affable and courteous; circumſpect in his words; grave, without affectation or ſourneſs; and chearful without levity.

But his perfect obedience to the commands and directions of ſuperiors, and his exact obſervance of diſcipline, were the virtues that ſhined moſt in him: For though his deſire of improving in knowledge was not leſs than might be expected from an excellent genius,

and the crop was anſwerable to the fruitfulneſs of the beſt ſoil and the moſt aſſiduous endeavours; yet his ſtudies never took him off from the performance of any religious duty, eſpecially ſuch as the rules of the place directed him to. Of theſe he was ſo ſtrict an obſerver, that, whatever he was doing, the toll of the bell was as promptly obeyed by him as if it had been the voice of an angel calling upon him. Some, perhaps, will look upon this as too minute a circumſtance to lay any great ſtreſs upon: But I am of another opinion; and I cannot but take it to be a moſt extenſive and ſubſtantial eulogium, of a perſon living in a regular community, to ſay of him, That he was a ſtrict obſerver of diſcipline and order; this being one of the ſureſt viſible marks we can have of a man mortified in his own will, and conducted by the Spirit of God in the common duties of life: becauſe, as the love of liberty is one of the ſtrongeſt paſſions of human nature, ſo to live under diſcipline, and be tied up by rules, is a continual practice of ſelf-denial.

When he had thus prepared himſelf by a conſtant gradual progreſs in virtue and learning, he was promoted to holy orders, and ſoon after made *Prefect* (as they call it), or Superviſor of the Studies of the College; in

which employment he behaved himſelf with the greateſt prudence and ſagacity, and gave ſo general a ſatisfaction, that it became apparent, that none are more capable of governing others than they who have firſt faithfully performed all the parts of an humble ſubjection.

It was towards the end of the reign of King Charles the Second he was ſent over into England, where he began the holy exerciſe of his miſſion with catechiſing children, and inſtructing the poor; whoſe cellars and garrets he ſoon became much better acquainted with than the houſes of the rich. His great parts and eminent learning never made him think it beneath him to deſcend to the very loweſt offices of charity. On the contrary, they were his choice, becauſe the ſafeſt, and fartheſt removed from the dangerous temptations of intereſt and vanity.

But muſt a perſon then hide the talents he has received for fear of being vain? No, certainly. But he may wait for proper times and ſeaſons to employ them the better for God's honour, and the good of his neighbour; and it is always ſafer erring by a modeſt backwardneſs, than an over-forwardneſs to ſhew them. This was the reaſon why, at his firſt entrance into the miſſion, he choſe to move in ſo low a ſphere, as being both moſt agreeable to his humble diſpoſition,

and beſt ſuited to the circumſtances of the time. But when King James the Second had mounted the throne, and the nation was poſſeſſed with a violent fear of that worſhip in which our anceſtors were bred up; when the prince's religion, under the pious pretence of hindering its farther progreſs, was painted to the people in the blackeſt colours, and both the *preſs* and *pulpit* were employed to load it with the groſſeſt calumnies; then the humble Mr GOTHER, being called upon by his ſuperiors to ſtand in the gap, judged it was the proper time to do ſomething elſe beſides catechiſing children; and 'tis to the occaſion of thoſe turbulent times we are indebted for thoſe excellent controverſial tracts, which will be an everlaſting monument of his capacity and learning. 'Twas then he wrote that admirable apology for the *Roman Catholic Faith*, intitled, *A Papiſt Miſrepreſented and Repreſented*, and the other pieces occaſioned by it, which are all of ineſtimable value.—His *Nubes teſtium*, with the defence of it; his *Advice to the Pulpits*, with many other polemical diſcourſes compoſed by him to ſilence the clamours of his peeviſh adverſaries (who for their number might be called *legion*) deſerve the ſame eulogium.

As to his ſtile, I wiſh it could be as eaſily imitated as admired. I own I have always

been an admirer of it, and I profeſs it the more freely, ſince I have been informed that ſo great a man as Mr *Dryden* ſtuck not to expreſs his liking of it. There is nothing in it that ſavours of the pedant; but a gentleman-like eaſineſs and politeneſs is remarkable in all his writings: And it is very much to be wondered, that a perſon educated for ſo many years in a foreign ſeminary, could, on a ſudden, become ſo great a maſter of the Engliſh tongue.

But what deſerves the higheſt commendation is, that in the great variety of diſputes he had with Proteſtants, he was always perfectly maſter of his temper, even under the ſharpeſt provocations; nor are his writings ſullied with any unguarded expreſſions, or ſallies, which ſavour of paſſion. His zeal was ſtrong, indeed, but not fiery; and only ſought to convince the judgments, and convert the hearts of his adverſaries; but not to imbitter their ſpirits: And therefore we ſhall never find him crowing indecently over them, even when the advantage of the argument was moſt manifeſtly on his ſide. In effect, no man knew more perfectly how to keep within the bounds of a blameleſs defence, and ſtop the career of his pen as ſoon as it had done its duty to truth and juſtice. If there was ſometimes a neceſſity of ſharpening his ſtile, he took care to manage it with ſo

ſkilful and charitable a hand, that the perſons of his adverſaries never felt the edge of it: So that they could not but be ſenſible, that though he was a profeſſed enemy to their cauſe, and obliged to lay open their errors, and ſearch their ulcers to the bottom, he always had a tender regard for the perſons even of thoſe whoſe pens did not always obſerve ſo exact a decorum, and might have provoked a perſon of leſs charity and moderation to ſhew ſome reſentment of it.

Thus was Mr GOTHER the champion of the *Catholic Faith*, whilſt it was attacked with the utmoſt violence; and all the unfaireſt methods of invectives, ſatyrs, and lampoons, were employed to aſperſe it. Soon after came on the Revolution, whereby the principal occaſion of theſe heats about religion being removed, this worthy labourer in *Chriſt's vineyard* judged, that from thence forward he could not employ his pen more advantageouſly for the good of his neighbour, than in furniſhing him with all ſorts of inſtructions for the conduct of his life, the overcoming of ſin, improvement in virtue, and how to direct his ſteps in the ways of bliſs; which are the whole ſubject of thoſe excellent moral treatiſes that are now reprinted, and were compoſed by him at his ſpare hours during the time of his reſidence in Mr H——'s

family; where he was placed ſoon after the Revolution, and continued till his intended voyage to Liſbon; which a pure motive of charity, and zeal for his mother college, prompted him to undertake. But Providence turned it for him into a voyage to a better world; for he died at ſea on Monday the 2d of October, 1704, after having received the holy rites of the church, with an exemplary piety and devotion, and ſo entire a ſubmiſſion to the will of God, that not the leaſt word of complaint was heard to drop from his lips; nor any marks of diſturbance, on account of the place or circumſtances of his death, or of the diſappointment that attended it, could be obſerved in him. The captain of the ſhip, who was a Genoeſe, and indeed the whole ſhip's crew, conceived ſo high an idea of his virtue by what they ſaw of his edifying behaviour during the time of his ſickneſs, that they all regarded him as a moſt holy man: And the captain, in token of the eſteem he had for him, inſtead of ſuffering his body to be thrown into the ſea, as is uſual on ſuch occaſions, ordered it to be embalmed, and put into a coffin, in order to be carried to the Engliſh college, where his mortal remains lie interred under St Thomas's altar.

This was the chriſtian *exit* of this worthy Miſſioner, who died a victim of charity to his neighbour, after having ſpent the beſt part

of his life in the moſt laborious exerciſes of it; and, with all the cheerfulneſs which true piety can inſpire, left this world which he had never loved. He was certainly a man of a moſt excellent ſpirit, though it was lodged in a very mean body; for he had nothing in his perſon but a ſharp and ſprightly eye to recommend him. Whatever ſtation he was in, his carriage was without reproach. His converſation, though grave and ſerious, was ſo tempered with a cheerful and agreeable facetiouſneſs, and ſo entirely free from any thing of an aſſuming air, that both learned and unlearned, rich and poor, were equally charmed with it: For in company he made himſelf all things to all, in order to gain all to Chriſt. He had ſo abſolute a command over his paſſions, and poſſeſſed himſelf ſo perfectly in all occurrences, that he was never obſerved to betray any irregular heat, either in words or actions, that could give offence to his neighbour; which made his corrections, when neceſſary, to be ſeaſoned with ſo much mildneſs, that they ſeldom failed of having their deſired effect; the offenders being convinced they proceeded from pure charity; and that when he was forced to reprove them, he offered violence to his own nature, and was the greater ſufferer of the two.

He was remarkably modeſt in his dreſs, which he regulated by the ſtricteſt rules of neceſſary decency; retrenching every thing he thought ſuperfluous, and even the uſe of many ordinary conveniences, which cannot be counted ſuperfluities, though they appeared ſo to his mortified and charitable diſpoſition; whereby he was enabled to gratify his compaſſionate tenderneſs for the poor, and relieve their wants with what he denied to himſelf: So that, inſtead of being ſolicitous to lay up money for a helpleſs old age, his whole ſtudy was to ſpend it in the moſt chriſtian manner. Nay, when he was near his death, the captain of the ſhip deſiring him to make his will, he anſwered him, that he was a poor man, and had nothing of value to diſpoſe of that required a will.

He was generally of an infirm and ſickly habit of body, which was very much increaſed by his rigid faſts, his continual application to prayer and ſtudy, and the laborious functions of his miſſion, in which he was indefatigable: So that, if we conſider his frequent preaching, catechiſing, viſiting the ſick, adminiſtring the ſacraments, and the importunity and frequency of thoſe who came to conſult him about their ſpiritual affairs, it is to be extremely admired that one of ſo ſickly and broken a conſtitution

ſhould not only find time enough, but have vigour of mind ſufficient, to compoſe the many excellent treatiſes he has left behind him. But we muſt attribute it to the ſtrength of his zeal, and greatneſs of ſpirit, which ſupplied the defects of health, and bore him up againſt the infirmities of a crazy body. Beſides, he was a moſt thrifty manager of his time; for he roſe with the ſun in the ſummer, and prevented it in the winter, by quitting his reſt at five in the morning. This was his conſtant practice, if not interrupted by a fit of ſickneſs; and the hours of each day were ſo regularly divided between his ſtudies, his duties to God and his neighbour, that no part of them could ſlip unprofitably from him.

This is the faithful picture in miniature of the pious and learned Mr GOTHER, which I was deſired to draw for the information of thoſe who ſhall happen to read his books: And 'tis the ſmalleſt tribute we can pay to the memory of a perſon who has deſerved ſo well of the church, and to whom we are ſo highly indebted for the ſpiritual treaſures he has enriched us with. I ſhall conclude with this brief and pithy eulogium of him, viz. *that his life and writings were exactly of a piece, for he lived up to every thing he taught.* Read but his books, and you will know the man.

THE

PREFACE.

I Am very ſenſible how difficult it is to give inſtructions, eſpecially when zeal itſelf, through human weakneſs, is ſubject to many falſe ſteps; and endeavouring to remove abuſes, may eaſily carry the ſtroke ſo far, as to give diſquiet to pious ſouls, in ſuch practices, which, in their particular circumſtances, are not at all reprehenſible. This may be the caſe of the following inſtructions; and therefore I here make it my requeſt to the pious reader, that if, in the cenſure of known corruptions, he finds here any thing pronounced with ſuch ſeeming ſeverity, as may give occaſion to him of ſuch diſturbance, he would not make an over-haſty application of it to himſelf; but conſult thoſe, under whoſe conduct he is, how far he may be concerned in what is ſaid. This ought to be the rule in reading all books of direction; and I deſire it may be in this: For thus only can I accompliſh my deſign; that while I deſire to inſtruct many, I may impoſe on none. In this manner I conſult the peace of all pious and well-principled ſouls, and beſpeak their moſt favourable conſtruction

of these Sunday-lessons, *in return to my charity for them; and hope that, having here given them this caution, they will not condemn me for being severe to them; since now they cannot justly do it, without being severe to me. But now, as for being represented under this character by others, 'tis what I expect, and, it may be, desire: For though I know how to have compassion, and pray for all that are under any spiritual infirmity, yet I resolve not to flatter or favour them in it. This is a weakness we are all generally too subject to, in regard of ourselves; and whoever makes any observation, will easily discover the great mischiefs of it, and how pernicious it is in its consequences. 'Tis a thing I often lament, and wish I could contribute any thing to its cure; and this being the design of the following instructions, it cannot be expected I should be favourable, but severe, to every thing, which I see to be the cause or occasion of those evils, which are prejudicial to souls, and a scandal to the Christian world. 'Tis on this consideration, I may be found to pass very hard censures on several things, which in practice are by many reputed innocent; and, it may be, have example, custom, and authority to plead for them; and were I to be an advocate for the world, I should then as much favour, as I now heartily condemn them. But having undertaken a better cause, I endeavour*

to consider every thing, as it regards eternity; and as I find it prejudicial to this end, so accordingly I fix its character, without any respect at all to what the world says of it. Hence I foresee a necessary disagreement with all those, who have no other idea of things, than what custom *and* practice *have imprinted in them; and I shall be judged severe for not concurring with their sentiments. But 'tis what I desire rather to bear, than prevent or remedy. I have taken the weights of the sanctuary into my hand, and as every thing weighs, so I give in the value; if it agrees not with what others are already prepossessed with, 'tis because they follow another account, and such as I cannot do, without betraying the cause I have undertaken. I know the world to be corrupt, and its ways generally perverse, and have so mean an opinion of it, that had I no other motive, my only disagreeing with it would be an argument of my being in the right. What such and such others therefore do, weighs but little in my balance, except only where persons regulate what they do by the principles of the gospel, and the doctrine of Christ. 'Tis there I learn what the world is; that it is an enemy to God, that its greatness is vanity, that its wisdom is foolishness: There I learn what I myself am; that I am dust and ashes; that of myself I can do nothing; that my inclinations are corrupt, and my desires opposite to God, and that to follow him I must renounce*

both the world and myſelf. This is not only mine, but every Chriſtian's cauſe; 'tis what they have all undertaken at the font, and what muſt be the practice of their lives, if they live up to what they profeſs; and if they do not, 'tis the goſpel reproves and condemns them, and not I. For if there they are commanded to follow Chriſt, *and be* followers of God, as his deareſt children, *what authority of* cuſtom *or* practice *can diſpenſe with them in this duty? Is not the goſpel their condemnation in as many particulars, as they depart from God, to follow the world, or themſelves? 'Tis ſome of theſe particulars I endeavour to lay before them; and if the world appears uneaſy or angry at it, it is not a ſurpriſe to me; for I never thought it humble enough to hear of its faults, without expreſſing its reſentment and diſlike; this is only doing like itſelf. It did ſo to our divine Maſter, and to experience ſomething of it, is one argument at leaſt of a true diſciple. Well, but may not this buſineſs of laying before the world its corrupt practices, be preſſed with too great rigour, ſo as to prove a diſcouragement to many from ever thinking of a reformation? The narrow way may be deſcribed narrower than it really is, and this will be no ſervice to Chriſtianity, but a condemnation of one extreme, by running in to another. This has been often ſo in points of faith; the preſſing the cauſe too far againſt the* Neſtorians, *made* Eutychians; *and may there*

not be the ſame danger in morals? Something of this there may be, and thoſe who are in love with their admired liberties, I doubt not, will make uſe of this plea, that they may never think themſelves obliged to quit them. But however we may ſuppoſe this danger in the teacher, is there any reaſon to apprehend it in thoſe that undertake to follow him? In matters of faith, 'tis eaſy running too far, becauſe truth conſiſts in a point, and has error on each ſide. But in morals it is not ſo; for though the precepts are determined and fixed, yet thoſe who do more than the precepts abſolutely oblige, are ſo far from being reprehenſible, that they are the better Chriſtians for it: To come ſhort of them is criminal; but to out-go them is perfection. However therefore I may be expoſed to overſights in preſſing more than is neceſſary, there is but little danger, in thoſe that pretend to practice, of being better than they ſhould be; let them do their utmoſt, 'tis very likely they will come ſhort of what is preſcribed, and that if I have gone too far, they will in this correct my error; an error which, if a real one, will be eaſily pardoned by all who, ſeriouſly conſidering the almoſt univerſal depravation of Chriſtians, will give allowance to zeal, and conclude there is but very little danger of preſſing duties too far;—a crooked ſtick muſt be bent a little the other way, to make it come ſtraight. Though I am of opinion, too, none will cenſure me even

for this, but only such as take the measures of Christianity from education, example, and practice; and hence being possessed with wrong notions, are likely to disapprove of these directions, *which consider not so much what Christians are, as what they ought to be. But since from the gospel itself, and St* Paul's *epistle, the first and best comment upon it, is taken the Christian's character here described in these* instructions, *I hope it may so far prevail on prejudice itself, as first to consider the authority on which it is grounded, and then reflect, whether it carries not so much weight with it, as to make them question at least the* truth *of that* idea of a Christian life, *with which they are already possessed from other principles. This is the only request I make in behalf of all that follows, and I think 'tis reasonable. To the just issue of such a consideration I sincerely appeal; and that I may contribute something to a fair determination, I will here set down some principles of the* gospel *and* sacred epistles, *which may give light to the bringing in a just verdict.*

And First, As to the notion Christians ought to have of the world; *Christ says* "The world hates him, and so it will those that follow him: That if they were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, *Jo.* xv. 18. Know you not, that the

friendſhip of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God, *Jam.* iv. 4. Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, 1 *Jo.* ii. 15. The whole world lies in wickedneſs, 1 *Jo.* v. 19. Whatſoever is born of God, overcomes the world, 1 *Jo.* v. 4. We have received, not the ſpirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, 1 *Cor.* ii. 12. Be not conformed to the world, *Rom.* xii. 2."

Secondly, As to the idea Chriſtians are to have of the fleſh: We are not debtors to the fleſh, to live according to the fleſh; for if you live according to the fleſh, you ſhall die, *Rom.* viii. 12. They who are according to the fleſh, mind the things of the fleſh; but they who are according to the ſpirit, the things of the ſpirit: For to be carnally minded, is death; but to be ſpiritually minded, is life and peace: Becauſe the carnal mind is enmity with God; for it is not ſubject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. So then, they that are in the fleſh, (*that is, live according to it*) cannot pleaſe God. But you are not in the fleſh, but in the ſpirit, if ſo be that the Spirit of God dwells in you, *Rom.* viii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. The animal or carnal man perceives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are fooliſhneſs to him; neither can

he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned, 1 *Cor.* ii. 14.

Thirdly, The works of the fleſh are adultery, fornication, uncleanneſs, laſciviouſneſs, idolatry, witchcraft, enmities, ſtrife, jealouſies, anger, quarrelling, diſſenſions, hereſies, envy, murder, drunkenneſs, revelling, and ſuch-like; of which I tell you, as I have already told you, that they who do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God, *Gal.* v. 19, 20, 21. *Again*, They follow the works of the fleſh, and are given over to a reprobate mind, who are filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, covetouſneſs, wickedneſs, full of envy, murder, contention, fraud, malignity, whiſperers, backbiters, haters of God, injurious, proud, boaſters, inventors of evil, diſobedient to parents, without underſtanding, without modeſty, without natural affection, covenant-breakers, unmerciful, *Rom.* i. 29, 30.

Fourthly, *The world and fleſh being corrupt, the chriſtian's obligation is to renounce both:* They are to mortify the deeds of the fleſh by the ſpirit, *Rom.* viii. 13. Are not to make proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof, *Rom.* xiii. 14. They are to crucify their fleſh, with its affections and luſts, *Gal.* v. 24. For he that ſoweth to his fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption, *Gal.* vi. 8. They are to overcome the world, 1 *Jo.* v. 4. The

world is to be crucified to them, and they to the world, *Gal.* vi. 14. They are to deny themſelves, take up their croſs, and follow Chriſt, *Matt.* xvi. 24. They are to be buried with Chriſt by baptiſm into death: Be planted together in the likeneſs of his death: Their old man is to be crucified with him, that the body of ſin may be deſtroyed, and they ſerve ſin no more: They are to be dead with Chriſt, dead to ſin, *Rom.* vi. 4, 5, 6, 8, 11. They are to put off their former converſation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to its deceitful luſts, *Eph.* iv. 22. They are always to bear about in the body the mortification of Jeſus Chriſt, 2 *Cor.* iv. 10. Renounce impiety and worldly affections, *Tit.* ii. 12. Mortify their members which are upon earth, uncleanneſs, inordinate affection, *Col.* iii. 5. They are to abſtain from all things to gain the crown; chaſtiſe their bodies, and bring them into ſubjection, 1 *Cor.* ix. 25, 27.

Fifthly, Being obliged to renounce the world and themſelves, how are Chriſtians to live? The life of Jeſus is to be manifeſted in them, 2 *Cor.* iv. 11. Chriſt is to be formed in them, *Gal.* iv. 19. They are to walk in the ſpirit, *Gal.* v. 16. Become a new creature in Chriſt, 2 *Cor.* v. 17. Be renewed in ſpirit; put on the new man, which is created according to God, in juſtice and true holi-

neſs, *Eph.* iv. 23, 24. Be reformed, by renewing their mind, *Rom.* xii. 2. Serve in the newneſs of ſpirit, *Rom.* vii. 6. Walk in the newneſs of life, *Rom.* vi. 4. Put on our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, *Rom.* xiii. 14. Walk ſo, even as he himſelf walked, 1 *Jo.* ii. 6. Be a new creature in Chriſt, 2 *Cor.* v. 17. Be led by the Spirit of God, for whoever has not the Spirit of Chriſt, is none of his, *Rom.* viii. 9, 14.

Sixthly, Chriſtians being obliged to renounce the world and themſelves, and walk by the Spirit of God, St Paul *declares in particular what they are to avoid, as things inconſiſtent with the Spirit,* viz. All injuſtice, adultery, fornication, uncleanneſs, murder, maliciouſneſs, contention, animoſity, anger, hatred, envy, backbiting, whiſpering, pride, diſobedience, theft, deceit, drunkenneſs, gluttony, revellings, covetouſneſs, fooliſh talking, filthy communication, idolatry, prophaneneſs, hereſies, vain babbling, curſing, revenge, raſh judgments, falſe accuſations. They are to do wrong to none, defraud none, nor corrupt any man; they are not to bite, nor devour others; nor be lovers of themſelves, nor of pleaſures; they are not to be fierce or high-minded, nor truſt in riches, nor ſpeak evil of any man; they are not to be ſlothful in buſineſs, nor impatient, nor return evil for evil, &c.

Seventhly, The ſame apoſtle declares what are the duties of Chriſtians in conſequence of their being led by the Spirit of Chriſt, viz. The love of God and their neighbour, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs, temperance; they are to put on the bowels of mercy, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, forbearing and forgiving others, keep the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace, ſpeak the truth, do good to all men, be never weary in well-doing; perſecuted, they are to ſuffer; and when reviled, they are to bleſs: They are to cleanſe themſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and the ſpirit, walk worthy of their vocation, worthy of God as his children, pleaſing to all, fruitful in every good work; they are to be ſober and watchful; walk circumſpectly, redeeming the time, underſtanding what is the will of God: They are to ſtudy to be quiet, and do their own buſineſs; withdraw themſelves from every brother that walketh diſorderly, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, ſupport the weak, be patient towards all men, and abſtain from all appearance of evil. Not live to themſelves, but to him who died for them; think on whatever things are honeſt, whatever things are juſt, whatever things are pure, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, let them think

think on theſe things. Their converſation is to be as becomes the goſpel of Chriſt; they are to ſeek thoſe things which are above; ſet their affections on things above, not on things on earth; whatever they do in word or deed, they are to do all in the name of our Lord Jeſus. They are to be fervent in prayer, given to hoſpitality, feed their enemy, rejoice in hope, preſent their bodies a living ſacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, proving what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Theſe are the characters the ſcripture gives of the world and the fleſh, and of a Chriſtian life; and hence ought to be taken the rule of what we are to approve, and what to diſlike; of what we are to follow, and what to avoid. And though the too general practice of Chriſtians be not very conformable to theſe; yet if practice is different from the goſpel, I hope there is no need of a long deliberation to determine, which ought to take place. This, if I miſtake not, is all I have done; ſhewing no reſpect to cuſtom *and* example, *when I find them contrary to the* goſpel: *As I ſee things there already determined, ſo accordingly I declare for them, or againſt them; recommending whatever may be ſerviceable for our coming up to that life, which is there deſcribed as the life of Chriſt, and ought to be the life of every Chriſtian; and diſcouraging whatever in practice I ſee either im-*

mediately or remotely is a hinderance to it. These are the measures I take, and are such as must stand good; all others are false, and will not be allowed in the day of accounts. If there be any mistake, it can be only in the application of them, and this the charitable reader will pardon in me, and take care to prevent in himself; for as I desire to help him, so I desire this help may no ways be perverted to his prejudice; and with this caution I leave him to all that follows.

IN-

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUNDAYS.

First Sunday of ADVENT.

EPISTLE.

Romans xiii. 11. ends verse 14.

"*IT is now time for us to arise from sleep— let us therefore cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light.* With this day we begin *Advent*, a time appointed by the church to prepare for the great solemnity of *Christmas* now approaching, when with adoration and gratitude we are to celebrate that ineffable mystery of the second person of the blessed Trinity made man, being born of the Virgin *Mary* for our redemption: To pre-

pare, I say, for this great solemnity, these four weeks of *Advent*, are appointed us by the church; and for this end it is, she on this day calls out to us, in the words of St *Paul*, *'Tis now time to arise from sleep, cast away the works of darkness:* Now when the Son of God is approaching, now when we are to prepare to meet him, no more sleep of tepidity and sloth; no more sleep of gluttony, luxury, intemperance; no more sleep of contention, animosities, and envy. No, we are to sanctify ourselves, as the *Jews* were commanded to do, when God had promised to come down in sight of the people; and so endeavour to receive him with interior dispositions suitable to the greatness of the mystery: without this, we can expect very little effect of this mercy; but have reason to fear, through our unworthiness, we shall be wholly excluded, with that unhappy man, who came to the marriage feast without the wedding garment.

We are then this day to rise from the sleep of sloth and tepidity; for when the Son of God compassionating our misery, descends upon earth, cloathed with our humanity, and subjects himself not only to the common hardships of this mortal state, but chuses even that bitter portion of it, in

poverty, contempt, perſecution, reproaches, to which nature is ſo much averſe, and concludes all in the unſpeakable torments of a cruel and ignominious death: When the Son of God, I ſay, for the love of us and our ſalvation, comes thus into the midſt of us, is it not time for us to riſe from the ſleep of ſloth? Or can we imagine, we have either reaſon or faith, if this infinite charity of our redeemer be not enough to awaken us? Captives who have paſſed many years tired under the weight of oppreſſion and chains, and now loſt all hopes of liberty, upon the news of an unexpected deliverer approaching, who at his own charges and taking upon him their ſlavery, deſigns their ranſom, muſt certainly receive new life; and raiſing up their dull ſpirits, in tranſports of joy, expreſs their reſpect and gratitude to their redeemer: Here all dejection would be inſenſibility; and heavy ſleepineſs, ingratitude. 'Tis our very caſe; and therefore for us to lie ſtill now, when we have the encouragement of ſuch a laborious charity before us; to go on ſlothful and ſleepy, and with little or no concern of ſhaking off our chains, when our redeemer comes, who not on free-coſt, but with the price of his blood purchaſes our ranſom, ſeems not a ſin of ſleepineſs, but

of affected ſtupidity, and is an ingratitude, I fear, unpardonable. 'Tis therefore now time for us to riſe from ſleep.

But have we not ſtill greater reaſon to caſt off the works of darkneſs, in renouncing all gluttony, luxury, and intemperance? For what part can they expect in the mercies of a redeemer, that comes to die for the overcoming of ſin, who in their lives go on maintaining the intereſt of ſin? This is to eſpouſe a cauſe contrary to Chriſt; and ſtand in oppoſition to him; and therefore it can be no leſs than mocking God, and miſerably impoſing on our own ſouls, to pretend to his mercies, while we have our hands thus lifted up againſt him. 'Tis like the abſurdity of thoſe, who ſeem to conſecrate a temple to the worſhip of the living God, and at the ſame time keep their idols there, and fall down before them. Every vice is an idol; luxury, intemperance, all ſinful love of creatures, are idols; and thoſe who ſatisfy their own diſordered paſſions in theſe or other like engagements, fall down before idols, and worſhip them, to the contempt of God and his law: But amongſt theſe, the ſins of contention, uncharitableneſs, and envy, are with a particular care to be renounced; for at a time, when the Son of God comes to lay down his life to make

a general peace, and reconcile the world with God, not excluding his enemies, the greateſt ſinners; but even for theſe deſiring to become a ſacrifice of expiation, there can be no juſt diſpenſation for animoſities, ill-will, and hatred amongſt chriſtians; but all theſe are to be chearfully quitted, in imitation of the infinite charity of our redeemer: For what grounds can they have for mercy, who ſhew none to others; or how can they hope for pardon of God, who forgive not their brother?

The moſt certain means, then, of receiving advantage from the mercy of this time, muſt be in following the Apoſtle's advice, in renouncing the evils we have contracted, and ſincerely labouring to put on our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: *Induimini Dominum Jeſum.* We muſt meet him in his own livery: Whatever we ſee practiſed by him, we muſt endeavour to copy out in our ſouls. As therefore we behold in him a total ſeparation from all that is corrupt and ſenſual: As we behold him in the perfect profeſſion of charity, humility, patience, purity, and every way performing his father's will; ſo, to receive the bleſſings of his nativity and redemption, we muſt be cloathed like him, diveſting ourſelves of the corruption of the old man, and putting

on the new, which is not according to nature, but according to God. This is to be the ſubject of our prayers and laborious endeavours in this time of *Advent:* 'Tis the church's charity to her children now to call upon them, and give them timely notice; that when God's hand are ſo full of bleſſings, to be poured forth upon his ſervants, they may be found prepared, and not loſe the benefit of this holy time, through their iniquity and neglect. For this end ſhe requires them to mend their dull and ſlothful pace, to ſpur forward with a more active and lively zeal, in imitation of that overflowing charity, with which Chriſt comes to us; ſhe commands them now to take ſome pains to put on Chriſt, and not be ſatisfied, till in their ſouls they can diſcover ſome real reſemblance of him. And how groſly muſt they deceive themſelves, who think there is any thing of this in a life of ſloth and ſin? Should a painter, deſired to repreſent in lively colours *peace and plenty;* and pretending to have finiſhed the piece, bring forth a horrid ſcene, frightful with all the ſeveral calamities of war and famine: Should he again, undertaking to deſcribe *temperance* and *patience*, paint out all the extravagancies of drunkenneſs, paſſion and fury: Should he, when aſked

to draw the beauty of a noon-day light in its ſtrongeſt rays repreſent the ſilence and horror of night; would not he be eſteemed ridiculous and mad, and juſtly be condemned to loſe his pay? Now, though this be an abſurdity ſcarce to be found in colours, yet 'tis what repreſents thoſe chriſtians to the life, who undertake, as it were, to copy Chriſt, and ſcarce have one ſtroke, which bears reſemblance with him. His humility and patience are to be imitated by them, and theirs is a life of pride and paſſion: His charity and labours are to be followed; and is this done by a life of idleneſs, ſloth, and ſelf-love? His holineſs, and forſaking the world, are to be adored and loved; and is this expreſſed in the repeated engagements of vice and folly? I cannot tell how far chriſtians think of this, but certainly they muſt imagine God to be an idol, blind and ſenſeleſs, if they perſuade themſelves, this will ever paſs for *putting on Chriſt*, or to be taken for a reſemblance of him. 'Tis this, then, ought to be our care at preſent, to draw a better copy; not to go on at eaſe in all our wonted liberties of ſloth and ſin; but firſt with the carver's hand, cut off all thoſe deformities, by repeated ſtrokes, which make us monſters, more like brutes than men: Work off all

paſſions and ill habits of vice and ſelf love; and then with the pencil lay on the goſpel colours of all chriſtian virtues, which may effectually render us like our Lord. See then, chriſtian, at this time, how much thou haſt to cut off: Set to the work, and though it requires force and violence, be not diſcouraged; 'Tis thus the rough and deformed wood is brought by degrees to ſhape, and becomes a lively expreſſion of a glorious martyr, or thy dying Lord. Let this be now thy work; advance ſomething every day; thus by degrees thou wilt come to put on Chriſt, and be prepared for all thy redeemer's bleſſings.

First Sunday of ADVENT.

GOSPEL.

Luke xxi. ver. 25. ends verſe 33.

MEN withering away for fear and expectation of thoſe things, which ſhall come upon the whole world. This day begins the holy time of *Advent;* a time, wherein the church calls upon all the faithful to prepare for the due celebration of the great feſtival of *Chriſtmas*, now approaching. It is then we renew the memory of Chriſt's birth, and are to acknowledge the infinite mercy of our redemption. On that mercy our ſalvation depends; and that we may be truly ſenſible, how much it is our intereſt to make an advantage of it, the church lays before us this day the terrors of the laſt and general judgment, that being now ſeaſoned with the fear of God's juſtice, we may be more ſolicitous, not only to adore, but in earneſt to lay hold of his mercy; ſince 'tis only the mercy of God can ſave us from the ſeverity of his juſtice. This is the method propoſed by the wiſe man: *The fear of our Lord* (ſays he)

is the beginning of wiſdom. The way to be wiſe to eternity is to begin with fear. Teach us, therefore, O God, this day to fear thee; *Confige timore tuo carnes meas;* let my fleſh be ſeized, and tremble with the apprehenſion of thy judgments, that by the happy effects of this ſeaſonable fear, I may prevent being one of that unhappy number, who living now fearleſs, will then begin to fear, when they ſhall ſee thy provoked juſtice falling upon them, without hopes of mercy.

'Tis now, then, we are in thought, to conſider ourſelves in the very circumſtances of the approaching judgment, and ſee, if from our imperfect apprehenſion, we can imagine what will then be the terror of poor ſouls, when they ſhall find all nature, not as now, offering itſelf to the uſe and ſatisfaction of man, but joining with God, to take revenge of ſin; when they ſhall ſee the ſun loſe its light, the moon grow dark, and the ſtars fall from Heaven, when they ſhall ſee themſelves in the confuſion of lightning, thunder, and earthquakes, not now according to the uſual courſe of nature, but rendered as terrible, as the power and anger of God can make them; when whirlwinds and ſtorms of fire ſhall purſue them in all their ſhelters;

when the noiſe of the ſwelling ſea ſhall threaten an univerſal flood; when the earth ſhall be ſhaken from its foundation; when all nature ſhall be in a convulſion, and no place or creature left to give relief; but wherever they fly from terrors, it ſhall be only to meet new terrors to confound them. If we can but remember what are the effects of ordinary thunder, lightning, or earthquakes, in the frights they cauſe, we may gueſs ſomething, what will be the confuſion of man in this general diſorder: When the frame of the whole world ſhall be disjointed, and quite falling in pieces; we may eaſily imagine, how men ſhall wither away for fear.

This fear will be increaſed with the expectation of what is yet to come; for though theſe are great evils, yet every ſinner will be ſenſible, of theſe, being only a preamble to greater. The criminal brought to the bar, and expecting the coming of the judge, who is to pronounce his doom, cannot but be ſtruck with terror, when he hears the noiſe and feet of thoſe, who are making way before him; becauſe then he knows his cauſe and crimes are to be laid open, and ſentence is to be pronounced againſt him. This is but a ſhadow of that unhappy ſtate in which all ſinners will be at this time: For

when they ſee the world in this diſorder, they will all have a ſenſe, that the preſent evils are only the forerunners of their judge, who is coming to take an account of their whole lives, of all their ſinful extravagancies, and will judge them according to their works. Who can apprehend here, what their confuſion will then be! They are conſcious of their own unworthineſs; all their ſins ſtand before them; they have now a full and perfect view of all their omiſſions and neglects, of the time they have loſt, of the mercies ſlighted, of the bleſſings they have abuſed: They know nothing can be hid from their judge; they know what their fate muſt be; they know now, what eternity is; what it is, to be for ever baniſhed from their God. All theſe thoughts preſs upon them with ſo heavy a weight, that they have ſcarce a ſenſe of the diſordered world; theſe fears then are ſwallowed up with greater: Nay, they rather deſire an increaſe of the preſent evils, wiſhing the mountains would fall upon them, and hide them from the anger of their God, or cruſh them into their primitive nothing.

But this cannot be; they muſt be preſented before their judge; and if they withered away before with fear, under the

apprehenſions only of this ſad appearance, what muſt their condition be now, when they are placed in the preſence of their judge; when they ſhall ſee their God, a God indeed, in majeſty and power, armed with terror againſt them, but without any glimpſe of mercy for them, excepting that only, which has been formerly neglected by them: When they ſhall ſee in the ſacred wounds of their Redeemer, how truly ſolicitous God has been for their ſalvation, who gave his only ſon a ſacrifice for their ſins; and in the ſame wounds ſhall now fully comprehend their own folly, blindneſs, and ingratitude, who have either paſſed by with contempt, or with obſtinacy reſiſted all theſe expedients of mercy. This will be ſuch a reproach of all their former ſloth and iniquity, that the goodneſs and mercy of God, which will be the comfort and life of the juſt, ſhall become the torment of ſinners; ſo that they ſhall deſire to retire from it, and even without a ſentence, be willing to hide themſelves in hell, rather than bear the tormenting reproaches of their own ſins, heightened beyond all meaſure from the ſight of their God, and his mercies. Sad and deſperate condition of ſouls, who have brought themſelves to that unhappi-

neſs, that infinite mercy and goodneſs, and God himſelf, are become to them a torment leſs tolerable than hell itſelf! But this is the effect of their own iniquity, and God's juſtice: They had lived divided from God, they would not hear his voice, nor regard his precepts; they choſe rather to follow their own corruption, and the grateful ſolicitations of the devil: Thus they lived, and thus dying, their ſouls become unchangeable, their diſorders and paſſions are hardened in them, and having ſubjected themſelves to the devil, they have him to command them for ever.

This will be the miſerable portion of thoſe unhappy ones, who have lived here unmindful of their duty, and their God, aggravated with ſo many frightful circumſtances of baniſhment from Heaven, of unſpeakable torments, of eternity, of an unchangeable ſtate, and of endleſs racks and deſpair; that there is no ſurprize in the wonderful effects it has had on thoſe, who have made it the ſubject of their ſerious thoughts: No wonder that the heart of St. *Jerome*, in his ſolitude, was ſeized with the dread of this day: No wonder, that St. *Auguſtin* made it his prayer, to be tormented, burnt, cut to pieces here, that he might be ſpared hereafter: No wonder

that ſo many pious chriſtians have retired from the dangers of the world, hid themſelves in caves and deſerts, renounced all that is pleaſing on earth; have choſen priſons, the ſword, and wild beaſts, that they might eſcape the terrors of this day.

The greater wonder is, that we who are yet behind, and ſay we believe this judgment to come, that we muſt all be preſented before the tribunal of Chriſt, be judged according to our works, and that all the workers of iniquity, all who live careleſs of ſalvation, ſhall be brought at length to this confuſion, and be excluded for ever from the ſight of God, with this ſentence; Go you curſed into eternal fire, there to be tormented with the devil and his angels for ever: For ever! as long as God ſhall be God, without hopes of relief or change: the greater wonder, I ſay, is, that we who believe this, ſhould live almoſt as unconcerned, as if we believed it not; that we ſhould prepare ſo little againſt that day, but be as eaſy and forward in ſinning, as if our danger of periſhing everlaſtingly was more from virtue, than from ſin. Conſider but the general wickedneſs of the chriſtian world, how almoſt all forſake the narrow way of the goſpel, and become the diſciples and ad-

mirers of a corrupt world; how intereſt and pleaſure are more powerful with them, than the commands of God; how fraud, over-reaching, prophaneneſs, gluttony, intemperance, luxury, &c. are their profeſſed practices, and without reproach; and then tell me, if it be not ſurpriſing, to find this their general method, who believe they are to render an account of what they do, and that ſin will find its puniſhment in everlaſting flames.

That we may give no occaſion to this wonder, we are to follow the ſpirit of the church, and imprint in our minds a lively ſenſe of the general judgment; that the remembrance of this may be a perpetual check to our corrupt inclinations, and a reſtraint to our paſſions; that this fear may withdraw us from ſin, and ſpur us on, now in time, to ſeek for mercy.

For this end, it would be a good practice every morning in this holy time, at our firſt awaking, to ſuggeſt this truth; Soul, remember that thou art to be called to judgment, there to give an account of all thy thoughts, words, and works; there to receive ſentence, either of an everlaſting baniſhment from Heaven, or of being with God for ever. And this will make the better impreſſion in the morning, if the ſame thoughts cloſe thy eyes at night.

Secondly, It will be the beſt wiſdom to prepare againſt the terrors of the laſt day, by calling ourſelves now to an account; by judging ourſelves that we may not be judged, and condemning ourſelves, that we may not be condemned. Nothing can cancel the old account, but a ſincere repentance, a true converſion of the heart, accompanied with an humble acknowledgement of our offences. And they, who deſire, that this undertaking may be no mockery of themſelves, and of God, muſt ſee what the evils are, to which they are ſubject, and now in earneſt reſolve, not to tolerate any thing in them, which in the laſt day will be the object of God's anger, or fuel for everlaſting flames. If there be difficulty in this work, let the thoughts of eternal fire give life to the undertaking, and puſh on the ſoul, amidſt the charms of ſloth, and all other pleaſing deluſions. If it be hard to reſiſt the corrupt inclinations of nature, let the queſtion be put, Whether it be harder to deny ourſelves for the moment of this life, or be tormented for ever. And if the thought of thoſe torments begins to loſe its ſting, endeavour to ſharpen it every day, by letting the fire, thou now ſeeſt ſo often, be a continual remembrance of the fire of hell.

These may be some helps; but to do all to the purpose, 'tis thou, O Lord, must inspire us with a lively sense of our danger, and teach us to fear thy judgments. Teach me now this lesson, I beseech thee, O Jesus, and let the memory of that last day so possess my soul, that I may have a continual dread upon me of all that is sinful; teach me now to lay hold of the mercy thou offerest, for thus only can be prevented the terrors of thy justice. Now I desire to renounce all sin, and make war against the corruption of nature and the world: This shall be my business, as long as I live; that so, when thou callest, I may be prepared to appear before thee, and have place in that number, who shall be invited with that joyful sentence; Come ye blessed of my father, and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you.

Second Sunday of ADVENT.

EPISTLE.

Rom. xv. ver. 4. ends verſe 13.

WHatever things have been written, have been written for our inſtruction, that by patience and the comfort of the ſcriptures we may have hope. The Apoſtle here declares the holy ſcriptures to have been written for our inſtruction; but in what? He ſays, *For our inſtruction in patience*, and to give us that *comfort* we here ſtand in need of, that our *hope* fail not. This is the end for which the ſcriptures were committed to writing. Wherefore, ſuch as peruſe them daily, and are not inſtructed in *patience* and this *comfort*, do not learn nor receive that benefit which God has deſigned for them; they may repeat texts and chapters, and yet be very ignorant in the ſcriptures; whilſt others, who appear leſs knowing, may, in effect, be better inſtructed in them, by having their ſouls more ſtrengthened in patience and comfort, the true effects of that divine nouriſhment.

Hence it muſt certainly be a great miſtake, to think the word of God was committed to writing, that ſo every unſkilful head might have the opportunity of interpreting it at pleaſure, might ſet up for prophets and apoſtles, erect churches, or religions, and take thence a commiſſion to fly in the face of that authority which Chriſt has eſtabliſhed, and the ſcriptures and creed recommended for the teaching his truth. No, this can be nothing but the uſurpation of a power, God has no where given them; and muſt be cenſured as the raſhneſs of preſuming men, who are vain enough to judge themſelves ſufficiently qualified to be their expoſitors and teachers; tho' at the ſame time, by being unlearned and unſtable, as St. *Peter* declares, they run the hazard of interpreting and *wreſting them to their own perdition*, *Pet.* 2. iii. 16. and but too evidently expoſe themſelves to the ſeverity of that ſentence pronounced in the *Revelations* againſt thoſe who add or take away from what is there written; ſince every falſe interpretation of the ſacred text involves this crime, by preſumptuouſly adding, or ſacrilegiouſly taking away from the truth there delivered. And there is no queſtion, this only reaſon has been the motive to the church, of uſing ſome re-

ſtriction, as to the reading the ſcriptures: She is very ſenſible of the common weakneſs of mankind, of the far greater number being *unlearned* and *unſtable;* and that while they are ſo, they have this common miſery attending them, as not to be ſenſible of it themſelves; but that generally a great preſumption is the companion of great ignorance: Hence, like a tender mother, who is obliged to take care of her children committed to her charge by Chriſt himſelf, ſhe feeds them with the divine nouriſhment of the holy ſcriptures, by faithfully inſtructing them in all chriſtian duties there expreſſed, without expoſing them to the weakneſs and uncertainty of their own private interpretations, or leaving them to pervert that ſacred food into poiſon. Were it not for this abuſe of holy writ, and how great it is, we experience in the almoſt infinite ſects of this nation, there would be no reſtraint in the reading it. And therefore, for ſuch who have any principles of ſteadineſs to balance the overfondneſs of their own thoughts, there is no difficulty in having this allowed them; nay, they may be encouraged to it. And while this liberty is granted to the *judicious* and *learned*, and the reſtraint is only in regard of the *unlearned* and *unſtable*, this cannot

in juſtice or reaſon be interpreted as a deſign to keep people in ignorance, or prevent the diſcovery of ſuppoſed errors; ſince the *learned* would more likely do this, than thoſe that were otherwiſe; but muſt be underſtood as a charity to theſe latter, to prevent the miſchiefs they might otherwiſe do themſelves, in wreſting the ſcriptures to their own deſtruction. For ſince the *unlearned* and *unſtable* are too apt to do this, is it not a kindneſs to give them a better and ſafer guide than themſelves, eſpecially ſuch as Chriſt himſelf has appointed for their help, and ſolemnly engaged his word it ſhall lead them into all truth? Such a guide to thoſe who are in danger of miſtaking their way, is certainly the effect of God's infinite mercy and ſolicitude for their eternal good; and to neglect this mercy muſt be the preſumption of men, chooſing rather to hazard the loſing their way under their own uncertain conduct, than be ſafely directed by the help of a ſecure hand, which God has appointed to lead them. And this preſumption is very ſurpriſing; for ſince the word of God itſelf has given this caution againſt private interpretation of ſcripture, and expreſsly declared that many, through their inconſtancy and inability, pervert it to their

own eternal ruin: And on the other ſide has fully recommended his *Holy Catholick Church* to us, not only by inſerting it in the creed, and obliging all to make profeſſion of believing it, but likewiſe by declaring it to be the *Ground and Pillar of Truth*, promiſing to be with it to the end of the world, that the gates of hell ſhall never prevail againſt it, that whoever heard it, ſhould hear him, and laying an obligation on all, of hearing it, under the penalty of being otherwiſe reputed as heathens: Since the word of God, I ſay, thus declares the uncertainty and danger of *private interpreters*, and recommends the church for a ſure guide; is it not a ſurpriſing thing, that in an affair of eternal concern, people ſhould leave what is certain for an uncertainty; and chooſe rather to follow what may probably lead them into danger, than what on Chriſt's word, would be ſecurity againſt it? Such principles as theſe we generally diſlike in all that regards our temporal intereſt; and to be led by them in the more weighty concern of our ſalvation, looks like the effect of an unaccountable blindneſs.

Thoſe therefore who deſire to be ſecured, read not the ſcripture to be their own interpreters, in determining *myſteries* of faith;

but as to theſe, hear that guide God has given them, and from which he has promiſed they ſhall hear the truth; and on this his promiſe they depend, which cannot fail, and not on the uncertainty of their own apprehenſion, which is ſubject to ſo many deluſions from education, prejudice, prepoſſeſſion, pride, ſelf-love, and intereſt, which are not eaſily diſcerned, and from which neither wit, learning, or human abilities are ſecure: But they read the ſcripture, for the end it was written; for their inſtruction in *patience*, and to receive the comfort it gives: They read it, to learn to ſuffer with patience all afflictions, the provocations and diſagreeable tempers of men, the mortality of their body, the weakneſs and darkneſs to which they are ſubject; the trouble of their own ſins; the humiliation of which they are to ſuffer, without being diſcouraged or dejected; the method of God's conduct over us, which is not always conformable to our inclinations, nor anſwerable to the impatience of our deſires; God has his time, and it is our duty to wait: Patience likewiſe in perſevering in good, and bearing all the diſcouragements it here meets with. The ſcripture teaches us to practiſe patience in all theſe particulars, and furniſhes us with

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powerful comforts to make us hold out, notwithſtanding all our weakneſs: And, no doubt, but whoever reads the ſcripture, not with the preſumption of interpreting and defining, but with the humility of one, who deſires to be inſtructed in patience and the practice of other chriſtian virtues, will find the fruit of his endeavours, in a plentiful harveſt; and, tho' never ſo unlearned, needs fear being reproved, but will rather be encouraged to drink daily at this fountain of life.

Second Sunday of ADVENT.

GOSPEL.

Matt. xi. 2. ends verſe 10.

JOHN *in Chains*, St *John Baptiſt* was ſent to prepare the way of Chriſt before him: And we being now in a time wherein we are to prepare for the great ſolemnity we yearly celebrate, of Chriſt's coming into the world, to undertake the work of our redemption; the church propoſes to us in this goſpel the example of St. *John*, and of St. *John* in priſon, that from him we may learn the beſt preparation, and moſt ſuitable to this time. The end of Chriſt's coming into this world was to ſuffer; the Baptiſt is ſent to prepare his way, and he is preſented to us this day in ſuffering: And is not this to teach us, that as many as deſire to prepare to meet their Lord, and receive the fruit of his coming, muſt learn to ſuffer; that ſo they may be fitted to communicate with the ſufferings of Chriſt, and in the way he has taught, have a part in his redemption? Let us therefore this day learn how we are to ſuffer.

Thoſe, who believe no life to come, have no other meaſure of things, but with reſpect to this life; and ſo they make every thing the object of their deſires or averſion, as it is agreeable or diſagreeable to their preſent ſtate. They approve pleaſure, liberty, and human greatneſs, and under theſe enjoyments think themſelves happy, becauſe theſe raiſe them in the opinion of this world: They have an abhorrence of all kind of ſufferings; becauſe this depriving them of what the world eſteems, and leſſening them in the eyes of men, they hence eſteem themſelves miſerable. This is the judgment of ſenſe; and ſuch men are called by the apoſtle ſenſual, or carnal men, becauſe they judge of every thing by the ſenſes.

But as for thoſe who truly deſire to be diſciples of Chriſt, they proceed upon very different principles: They have a faith of a life to come, and believe it their great buſineſs of this life, to provide for happineſs in a future ſtate. Hence they meaſure every thing here, not by any agreeableneſs to ſenſe, or by the common opinion of men, but by faith only, even that faith which is taught them by Chriſt; and by this rule, as far as every thing of this life contributes to

the gaining that which is eternal, or is contrary, or a hinderance to it; ſo they judge it to be good, evil or dangerous.

Upon this principle, the judgment they make of all kind of ſufferings, is different from that of the world. They conſider the ſufferings of this life, as a proper means to diſengage their hearts from all immoderate love of creatures, and of the world: And this love being that which puts them moſt in danger of a miſcarriage, as to everlaſting happineſs, they ſee ſuch an advantage in ſuffering, as even to find comfort under it, whilſt the world judges them miſerable. Again, they believe all ſufferings whatever to be the appointment of God; and that it is his will they ſhould drink of the bitter cup that is put into their hands, and carry whatever part of the croſs is laid upon their ſhoulders: They believe again, the moſt effectual means for obtaining future happineſs, is a ready ſubmiſſion to the will of God; and therefore, under all the uneaſineſs of ſuffering, they have this comfort of ſpirit to allay the bitterneſs of ſenſe, that they are in a way to the poſſeſſion of God, their moſt deſirable good; for the obtaining which, all loſs muſt be eſteemed gain.

They conſider again, there is no poſſibility of their lot being with the bleſſed, but by the help of God's grace; and then being taught, that God has regard to thoſe who are in affliction, undertakes their protection, and hears their prayer; they look on their trouble, if ſubmitted to with patience, as a means of obtaining that grace, which muſt be their help to life eternal: In this conſideration they ſee an advantage in their ſuffering, and know how to rejoice in this hope, whilſt the world is pitying their misfortune.

They conſider again, the danger of being excluded heaven can come from nothing but their ſins; and being aſſured the afflictions of this life, ſuffered with an humble ſpirit, are the moſt effectual means for obtaining mercy and pardon; that ſuffering with Chriſt, is the ſureſt way of partaking of the effect of Chriſt's ſufferings, and of reigning with him; they find ſomething more valuable in affliction, than in all worldly happineſs; and not judging it by ſenſe but by faith, eſteem it according to the value of that purchaſe, which is offered for it.

From theſe, and ſuch other principles of faith, reaſon receiving its direction, the faithful chriſtian learns how to ſuffer,

and poſitively judges it reaſonable to ſuffer whatever God appoints for him; nay, that he ſhould not act according to chriſtian reaſon, if he did not ſubmit to it with patience and comfort. And this is the method of his reaſoning: Being happy in the poſſeſſion of God, is the end of my very being, it is the end for which I was born into this world; and ought I not then to rejoice, when I am in the ſureſt way of coming to this end? Can I be in earneſt in deſiring Heaven, and not be ſatisfied when I am in the way that leads to it? There are many difficulties and dangers in this way, which hazard a miſcarriage, and is it not reaſonable for me to be comforted, when I ſee the difficulties diminiſhed, and the dangers leſſened? If I ſee eternal evils threaten; and may be ſheltered againſt their ſtroke, by ſubmitting to ſome temporal inconvenience, which cannot poſſibly laſt long, would it not be reaſonable to compound on theſe terms? Theſe are ſo reaſonable concluſions from the received principles of chriſtianity, that there is no acting againſt them, without doing violence to reaſon or faith.

Wherefore, the good chriſtian, tho' his ſenſes be as quick, and he feels as much as another, yet he looks beyond this; and

where faith informs him, that the ſuffering of ſenſe is available to an eternal good, he gives this light to reaſon, and ſo gives a preference to things that are ſerviceable to the great concern, and eſteems not that a misfortune, which opens a way to bliſs.

Hence in time of affliction, he is not anxiouſly ſolicitous to enquire into the cauſes, why Providence ſhould thus order the diſpoſition of things; neither in favour of his own fears does he conclude God's anger to be provoked againſt him: His only ſettled thought is, to make a right uſe of his ſuffering; becauſe he is convinced this will be to his advantage, whatever the reaſon be, for which God is pleaſed thus to viſit him: For ſhould it be the effect of God's diſpleaſure, he knows an humble ſubmiſſion to his ſcourge, is that which will moſt effectually move him to mercy, and make the beſt atonement for whatever provocation he has given.

Wherefore, baniſhing from his thoughts, in the beſt manner he can, all kind of ſolicitous and diſquieting amuſements, he conſiders his great misfortune here, is, that he is ſeparated from God, and in danger of being for ever ſeparated from him. No earthly troubles can have any proportion with this; and if the bearing theſe may be

a help, in uniting him to God, he thinks this a ſufficient reaſon for his ſubmitting, and embracing them with a chearful heart.

And if the ſoul at any time ſeems to ſink under any darkneſs or oppreſſion, then he endeavours to comfort her with the thoughts of that eternal weight of glory, which is prepared for thoſe that overcome; he lays before her the ſhortneſs of this life, and bids her compare its ſufferings with the reward, and with the endleſs ſufferings of the life to come: He preſents to her St. *John* in chains, *Peter* in priſon, *Paul* in perſecution, the Martyrs on the rack, Confeſſors in baniſhment, Hermits in the deſert, and infinite numbers of pious chriſtians, who, like *Job*, have ſuffered all the difficulties of this life, in the loſs of goods, health, friends, liberty, and life, and with the apoſtle, even rejoiced in their tribulation, in expectation of the promiſes. Then he demands of her, art thou better than theſe? If heaven was worth all their ſufferings, is it not worth thine? Be ſubject therefore to thy God; let him command, do thou obey; and let it be thy comfort to do his will, let it be thy ſatisfaction to be in the way to happineſs.

Thoſe chriſtians, who are governed by theſe principles, have reaſon to hope well, as to their future ſtate; becauſe, having almoſt every day ſomething to ſuffer, they have every day opportunity of making ſome advance towards bliſs. And how unhappy are thoſe who learn not this leſſon, which ought to be practiſed every day; but by their impatience even then loſe ground, when they are called upon to approach towards heaven! Help us in this point, O Jeſus, and ſince it is ſo ordained, that by many tribulations we muſt enter into happineſs, teach us to make a right uſe of whatever thou ſendeſt; teach us to ſuffer with patience; thou haſt taught us, it is true, by thy word, thou haſt taught us by thy example, but remember, I beſeech thee, our great weakneſs, and have compaſſion: Pardon our paſt failings, and ſo ſtrengthen us now by thy grace, that by ſuffering for the future, with an humble and reſigned ſpirit, we may thus give proof of our being what we profeſs, thy diſciples.

Third Sunday of ADVENT.

EPISTLE.

Phil. iv. 4. ends verſe 7.

REjoice always in our Lord: again I ſay, rejoice. 'Tis hard to apprehend, how a ſoul can love God, and not rejoice in him; for as we naturally rejoice in the proſperity or ſucceſs of a father or friend, whom we love; ſo, whoever loves God, and conſiders his glory, his happineſs, his holineſs, his juſtice, muſt feel interior comforts, and rejoice in God, being what he is. This joy is the ſubject of many *pſalms* and *hymns*, which we find in holy ſcripture, and ſuch like ought to have a part in the daily devotions of every chriſtian. Again, whoever reflects on that frightful ſtate, from which we have been delivered, and conſiders ſeriouſly the miſery of a ſoul ſubject to the devil's tyranny, dragged by him to everlaſting death, blinded with unreaſonable paſſions, and impoſed on with a thouſand groſs and criminal deluſions, will diſcover ſufficient reaſon to rejoice in the giver

of that powerful grace, whereby they have been brought to the truth of chriſtianity, and ſeparated, without any merit of theirs, from ſuch great numbers, yet left in the darkneſs of ignorance and error, and in the ſhadow of death. *Thirdly*, Whoever is ſenſible of the greatneſs of thoſe gifts, which they have received, in being made members of his myſtical body, the adopted children of God, heirs of heaven, and coheirs of Chriſt, and of the unſpeakable happineſs promiſed to ſuch poor worms, muſt neceſſarily rejoice in this hope, as in the ſettlement of an everlaſting inheritance, which is none of their right, but by the mercy of the giver, and not to be forfeited but by their fault. From this threefold head of the love of God, and the conſiderations of the evils from which we have been delivered, of the great bleſſings we enjoy, and infinitely greater promiſed, the ſervants of God have found ſufficient matter of joy, ſuch as has raiſed them above the deceitful ſatisfaction of the world, ſupported them in troubles, comforted them in perſecutions, and in the terror of death itſelf; and ſome degree of it ought to enter into every good chriſtian's heart; it being very difficult to conceive how a ſoul can be diſpoſed

to rejoice in God for ever, who does not begin here. And this more particularly at this time, when the mercies of our Redeemer's birth are laid before us, who comes to be our light, our comforter, our phyſician; and at the expence of his blood, to remove all thoſe evils of ſin, which can be the only diſcouragements of a chriſtian ſoul. His coming to call ſinners, and find the loſt ſheep, ought to raiſe up all hearts from dejection and deſpair, and his plentiful redemption oblige them to join in ſpirit with the bleſſed virgin, and rejoice in God our Saviour.

The conſideration of this day of rejoicing always in God, obliges us to cenſure and be very apprehenſive of their ſtate, whoſe ſouls are ſo worldly and truly indiſpoſed, as, through their own faults, to find no comfort in the performance of any chriſtian duty, nor any ſweetneſs in the thoughts of God and his infinite mercies; and for this end are ever ſeeking abroad for relief, and never eaſy, but amidſt dangerous and even ſinful diverſions, ſuch as the world is full of for the entertainment of worldly ſouls; theſe have their treaſure where their hearts are, and this being not in God, it is not in him they rejoice: And what then muſt their condition be

at the hour of death, when their ſouls going out of this world to appear before God, they are forſaking what they love, and not going to it? This muſt cauſe a trouble, and this trouble is but an ill preſage of rejoicing ever in God.

There is another ſort of chriſtians, who rejoice not in God, whoſe condition is more to be pitied than condemned, their diſorder being more their misfortune than their fault: And theſe are ſuch, as ſincerely deſire to ſeek God, take pains in finding him, have their thoughts on their duty, and are ever conſulting on this ſubject; but then, through the unhappineſs of a melancholy and over-fearful temper, are perplexed with crowds of ſuch apprehenſive and diſquieting thoughts, that though they truly ſerve God, yet they cannot poſſibly rejoice, or find any comfort in him. Their imagination is very ſtrong and lively; and every fancy that any way thwarts their duty, makes a very ſenſible impreſſion in them, then their exceſs of ſolicitude increaſing the horror, they are truly frighted; and paſſing ſentence with their fears, inſtead of framing a deliberate judgment, they haſtily condemn themſelves: Thus, though their guilt be nothing but imaginary, and the effect only of an

immoderate fear, yet it brings as great a diſquiet with it, as if it were real; their minds are oppreſſed with grief, which caſts them almoſt to deſpair, it is a perpetual diſtraction at their prayers, and hinderance in all other more ſacred duties; ſo that however they perform them all, yet it is without all ſenſe or feeling of devotion; and thus they drag on under the uneaſy weight of an oppreſſed, dark, and comfortleſs mind. This is their miſery, and what requires the prudent management of a diſcreet director, to help them in this their ſpiritual diſtreſs, and deliver them from the deluſions of a ſubtle enemy; who ſeeing no hopes of ſeparating them from God by ſin, thus hinders their approaching to him, fills them with fears, that ſo they may never have the liberty or quiet to improve in love, and their more ſubſtantial duties.

Their only remedy then muſt be, under God's hand, wholly to reſt in the direction of their ſpiritual director, to whom they muſt faithfully lay open their ſtate; and ever ſtrive to admit no other idea of themſelves, but what is according to the judgment he makes of them, without regarding the terrifying ſuggeſtions of their own fears. If he thinks better of them

than they do, it is what, by degrees, they muſt bring themſelves to believe, and carefully put by all other thoughts, that are contrary to his, as, what they truly are, temptations and deluſions: If they apprehend God to be angry with them, or that their director does not underſtand their caſe; away with theſe thoughts, they are temptations, the natural conſequence of their diſeaſe; the confidence in their guide ought to over-rule them all; and though this may appear arbitrary, yet it is nothing but what is reaſonable, juſt, and neceſſary; for ſince their own judgment is greatly diſcompoſed, their reaſon clouded with variety of fears and paſſions, what can be more proper and ſafe for them, than to admit the guidance of another's hand, and ſubmit to his judgment, which being not diſturbed like theirs, is more capable of giving direction, and preventing the miſchiefs of their blindneſs? This is a general method ordained by God for all, ſince the moſt judicious and ſedate, are not allowed to be the beſt judges in their own caſe, being expoſed to indiſcernable partialities and miſtakes; with how much more reaſon then ought it to be obſerved by theſe, whoſe judgments are wholly corrupt, and they as truly blind, as violence of paſſion

can poſſibly make them? So blind that they ſee nothing of their own ſtate; make no true conſtruction of themſelves; but without raſhneſs may be judged groſly to miſtake in almoſt every thought relating to their own diſeaſe; and therefore are ever tormenting themſelves with anxious and diſquieting fears, grieve to exceſs, and ſigh under oppreſſion and diſcouragement, and thus go on, as if it were reaſonable and juſt they ſhould do ſo: whereas it is a thing wholly unreaſonable and unjuſt, and condemned by as many ſpiritual authors as ſpeak of this ſubject. However difficult therefore it may be to renounce their own thoughts, in ſubmiſſion to the judgment of their director, yet it is what they muſt ſtrive to do, if ever they intend to be cured of this evil; and this not only as to the reſiſting all interior trouble, and entertaining a more favourable opinion of themſelves than their own inclination leads them to; but likewiſe of frequenting the ſacraments, as often as he ſhall adviſe, though at the ſame time they perceive no ſenſible advantage by them, but may interiorly ſuffer very much in complying with this duty; there being no other way for them to diſappoint the malicious ſnares of their enemy, who is willing to perſuade them,

that all their ſpiritual exerciſes are to no purpoſe; ſo by degrees to bring them to a total neglect of them, and lay aſide every thing that may be for their good.

And that they may perform this with ſome grounds of comfort, I deſire them to conſider ſeriouſly the true ſtate of their ſouls, which, I think, are not ſo indiſpoſed, but they may juſtly hope to partake of God's grace, and receive benefit by the ſacraments. For though there be generally an obſtinacy of judgment in them, which makes them difficult to be governed; though there be a ſecret pride at the root, and not ſo true a diſtruſt and knowledge of themſelves, nor ſubmiſſive confidence in God, as there ought, which cauſes that ſurprize and vexation at their own failings; yet ſince all this works inſenſibly in them, rather through indiſpoſition and ill temper of body, than by affectation or choice, 'tis to be hoped they have not the guilt, but only the misfortune of theſe evils. And then on the other ſide, there is a great portion of good at the bottom of all: For why is it they diſquiet and afflict themſelves ſo much? Does it not ariſe from the apprehenſion they have of not doing their duty, and having offended God, and the fear of his

being angry with them? Why is it they conſult their director, and ſo frequently deſire to be adviſed? Is not this an argument of their not being in love with their failings, and an evident deſire of amendment? There is a good will therefore, a good deſire, a good heart at the bottom, and commonly a total alienation of the mind from all the follies, vanities, and vicious corruptions of the world; ſo that their whole concern is centered in the great affair of their ſoul, the avoiding of evil, the ſervice of God, and their own ſalvation; and though they are ſubject to very great ſpiritual indiſcretions and ill management; yet ſince their hearts are ſincere in God, he cannot poſſibly reject them; nor can they reaſonably doubt of being prepared for receiving benefit in the ſacraments. Let them learn patience in their trouble, humility under the conduct of God, be contented with the meaſure of grace he is pleaſed to give them, and endeavour to be obedient to their director; and, no queſtion, they will come by degrees out of their oppreſſion and darkneſs, and rejoice in our Lord.

Third Sunday of ADVENT.

GOSPEL.

St. *John*, i. 19. ends verſe 28.

HE confeſſed, and denied it not; and he confeſſed that I am not Chriſt. This is the anſwer of St. *John Baptiſt* to the *Jews*, enquiring of him, if he was the Meſſias.

The whole time of *Advent* ought to be a preparation of chriſtians for celebrating the feſtival of the birth of Chriſt. God then humbled himſelf for man, and man cannot better prepare for the due acknowledgment of this mercy, than by ſincerely humbling himſelf before God: For this end, the church propoſes this day the example of the *Baptiſt*, who by his auſterity, preaching, and the adminiſtration of a new baptiſm, having given ſufficient occaſion to the *Jews* of ſuppoſing him to be the Meſſias; and being now queſtioned upon the point, poſitively denies it, takes no advantage of their miſtakes, and owns no more than he is obliged to by the force of their demands, in doing right to truth.

This ſpirit of humility muſt be our pattern in the preparation we make: If Chriſt humbled himſelf, we cannot be his diſciples, but by a like humility. We may come to ſome part of this, if we aſk every one of ourſelves the queſtion put to St. *John, Tu quis es? Who art thou? Quid dicis de teipſo? What ſayeſt thou of thyſelf?* For what can we anſwer? If we look into ourſelves, and there ſee the uncertainty and darkneſs of our underſtanding, the perverſeneſs of our will, the corruption of our affections, the blindneſs of our paſſions: If we conſider our weakneſs, in the little we can do, of all the good we propoſe; our ingratitude, in abuſing the infinite bleſſings of heaven; our unreaſonableneſs, in acting contrary to what we believe; in providing more for this life, than for that which is eternal; in our daily ſolicitude for things of the leaſt concern, and neglecting the greater, if we number all our ſins, which are the daily effects of this our weakneſs and corruption; what can we anſwer to the queſtion propoſed; but that we are of all creatures, the moſt unhappy; that we deſerve nothing but contempt, reproach, and puniſhment?

Then if we make but one reflection farther, and ſee, notwithſtanding all this

almoſt infinite miſery, how proud we are of ourſelves, how eager of eſteem and love, how much we labour to magnify this contemptible clay, this ſinful duſt; that this is the general buſineſs of our thoughts, money, and time; that to this we turn whatever we receive from God, this is ſo great an exaggeration of our miſery, that if our neceſſities, and great poverty, do not work in us a true humility, the conſideration of our pride, at leaſt, cannot fail of humbling us.

By a due reflection upon theſe particulars, and thus making an antidote of the poiſon, we may come ſo far, at leaſt, as to conclude there are reaſons enough to oblige us to that humility, to which the church this day calls us; and that if this be a proper means of preparing us for the benefit of Chriſt's nativity, it muſt be our want of thinking, if we are found unprepared.

But however, it is not thinking only will do the work; but we muſt purſue our thoughts with induſtrious and watchful endeavours, for ſuppreſſing the uſual effects of pride, which otherwiſe, being a ſubtle evil, will be often breaking forth, and when all other avenues are ſecured, will make an advantage of humility itſelf,

and perſuade the chriſtian to be proud of being humble. A watch therefore muſt be ſet to obſerve all its motions, and ſome particular reſolutions taken.

As Firſt, From the example of the *Baptiſt*, not to value ourſelves according to the miſtaken opinion which others have of us. It is eaſy for ſuch as are cautious, by an artificial management, to raiſe an eſteem in thoſe, whoſe charity makes them judge the whole man to be proportioned to that ſide which is ever ſet next them; this gains their applauſe, and becomes a temptation to thoſe whom they commend, of meaſuring themſelves from ſuch undeſigning flatteries. Here then is to be the chriſtian's care, to look farther than they do; and by caſting his eye upon his whole ſelf, to put all his infirmities, which are known to him, into the balance againſt their praiſes; and then ſee if he has any reaſon to be proud; eſpecially when he muſt confeſs, that theſe are his own proper ſtock, and that as to whatever is commendable in him, it is all the gift of God, and the praiſe is due to him: Then if he conſiders how unworthy he is of all ſuch bleſſings, he will find reaſons to adore the goodneſs of the giver, and to plant a ſeaſonable humility upon that ſtock, where

pride was upon the ſtart, and juſt ſhooting forth.

Secondly, To diſown with poſitiveneſs all miſtaken commendations; and yet not in ſuch a manner, as, by endeavouring to be thought ſincere, to retain the greateſt part of the honour deſigned him.

Thirdly, Not ſo to renounce falſe characters or titles, as to ſubſtitute others in their place, which are true: For though here be truth in the caſe, yet it is ſuch as is more for the advantage of pride, than it could have from their miſtakes, which, though pleaſing for the preſent, cannot laſt, when it is ſeen to be nothing but ſmoke.

Fourthly, Not to be forward in acknowledging in public, even the gifts received from God, farther than is neceſſary for doing right to truth; and then to ſo do it, that the praiſe may be given to God, and man humbled in the confeſſion of his unworthineſs in reſpect of ſuch favours. So far from the example of St. *John*: But becauſe man is many more ways in danger of pride, therefore,

Fifthly, He is to be careful not to entertain contemptible thoughts of others, upon any real or ſuppoſed advantages in himſelf, whether of nature, fortune, or grace; but

to conſider himſelf in them, whom he is inclined to undervalue, and ſee in them what he would be, did not the hand of mercy make the diſtinction.

Sixthly, Not with anxiety to diſquiet himſelf upon his experienced infirmities, or accidental occaſions of abjection or diſeſteem: For that ſuch trouble is the effect of pride; whilſt true humility ſubmits with patience to all manner of trouble; quietly, but ſtrongly, labours to amend; and while earneſt for help, yet with the ſame quiet waits God's time and pleaſure.

Seventhly, Not to yield to voluntary diſturbance, upon being reproved, or upon real or ſuppoſed contempts: Becauſe this diſturbance has pride at the root; and true humility, being ever ſenſible of its unworthineſs, acknowledges the evil it meets, to be much leſs than it deſerves.

Eighthly, Not to be too eager in maintaining his opinion in indifferent matters, nor be much concerned when contradicted; becauſe poſitiveneſs, ſtiffneſs, and a paſſionate concern, are the fruit of pride; whereas the victory and triumph of humility is in yielding; eſpecially where juſtice and neceſſary truths do not oblige to their defence.

Ninthly,

Ninthly, Not to engage in angry or peeviſh quarrels; becauſe pride produces paſſion, and the ſpirit of humility ſtudies peace; chooſing rather to overcome by ſuffering with meekneſs, than to maintain an unneceſſary cauſe by contention.

Laſtly, To avoid all manner of affectation whether in words or geſture, and obſerve moderation in whatever belongs to dreſſing, table, furniture, or ſtate: For if a Chriſtian knows himſelf a ſinner, and in this ſees contempt and puniſhment his due, humility will be regulated by this juſtice; and it muſt be pride that is induſtrious in ſeeking honour and greatneſs for that which deſerves it not, but is wholly unworthy of all ſuch courting. Here then the Chriſtian is to ſee, that under the cover of conſulting decency and the mode, he flatter not thoſe inclinations of pride which lead him contrary to the goſpel, and put him upon pleaſing and magnifying himſelf in all things, when the leaſt reflection will inform him, that this is acting contrary to juſtice, in there placing rewards where puniſhment is due, in ſtudying to gratify the unworthy, and raiſe the offender, who ought to be humbled.

Theſe endeavours are neceſſary for thoſe who deſire to prepare themſelves for the mercies of their Redeemer, who comes in

the ſpirit of humility: The *Baptiſt* has given us an example; but it is thou, O Jeſus, muſt give us ſtrength to ſtand againſt the attempts of the pride that is within us: It is a powerful and ſubtile evil, O God; and if we have not thy help, we ſhall fall a prey to its force or its ſnares. Help me, then, and have compaſſion on this preſumptuous clay; let me now humble myſelf in the conſideration of thy infinite mercy, and my own unworthineſs; and ſince thou haſt humbled thyſelf in ſtooping to all that is contemptible for my ſake, teach me to follow thee in all humility, and to renounce all pride, as much in fact, as I do in profeſſion.

Fourth Sunday of ADVENT.

EPISTLE.

1 *Cor.* iv. 1. ends verſe 5.

IT *is required of thoſe that are diſpenſers* of the myſteries of God, *that they be faithful.* St *Paul* having informed the *Corinthians* of his own character that they ought to regard him, as likewiſe all the paſtors of God's church, as the miniſters of Chriſt and diſpenſers of the myſteries of God; that the heavenly treaſures are entruſted in their hands; that in the name and by the authority of God, they are to inſtruct the faithful in his holy myſteries, and apply to them the merits and graces of Chriſt's paſſion: Then adds, that the thing required from theſe diſpenſers is, That they be faithful,

1. To God, in publiſhing his ſacred truths with zeal, defending them with courage, and managing them with prudence.

2. To Jeſus Chriſt, in honouring his miniſtry by a holy life reſembling his; in preaching his myſteries and the maxims of his goſ-

pel in all purity, without disguising them in favour of the world or corruption; and in applying the sacraments of his grace with charity, and the spirit of discretion, not admitting the unworthy to profane them.

3. They are to be faithful to the church, and the souls under their charge, in leading them in the ways of God's commandments with a watchful and laborious diligence; in supporting them with a Christian condescendence, and encouraging them by their good example.

Lastly, They are to be faithful in not seeking what they have renounced, to be great, to be rich, to be powerful; but using all endeavours to establish his power only, whose ministers they are; being always in the disposition of good servants, ever ready to labour, ready to obey. Thus are pastors to be faithful in the whole charge they have undertaken; and to be wanting in any part of it, either of instruction, watchfulness, labour, or good example, &c. is to be wanting in what St *Paul* says, is required of them; which is truly so very great, that were it seriously considered, as to the difficulty and concern of every particular, I think very few would thrust themselves upon it, and none engage in it, without a great apprehension and distrust of themselves, and daily seeking

the assistance of the Divine Spirit to carry them thro' it.

As for my own part, I find the charge so great, that whether in the worthy approaching every day to the altar; in instructing the ignorant; in spurring on the slothful; in treating with vicious and worldly souls; in giving advice in affairs of eternity; in administring the sacraments; in distinguishing weakness from unworthiness, so as not to terrify and discourage the one, or admit the other; in discerning betwixt practice and right, and infinite other perplexities that occur, I must needs confess my weakness; I know not how to be faithful to what I have undertaken, I am daily at a loss, *contristatus sum in exercitatione mea*; I labour as under a burthen; and if God does not assist, direct, and support me, I shall be infinitely wanting in my obligation: How shall I render an account of all those souls who have been committed to my charge? Happy are those pastors who, in preparing for this sacred function, have taken care, by the laborious exercises of mortification and virtue, to obtain a plentiful assistance of the Holy Spirit, by whose direction they may be secured against all the mischievous effects of human darkness, weakness, ignorance, negligence, and indiscretion; and who, every day, through the great sense of their own in-

ability, earneſtly implore his help and light, to carry them through all the difficulties of their obligation, and make them faithful to every part of it, whether in regard of themſelves or their neighbour.

And certainly none are more unhappy amongſt all Chriſtians, than thoſe who, having the charge of paſtors, have not the paſtoral Spirit; who have undertaken it on temporal motives, without being called of God; who have not been ſolicitous to obtain the divine ſuccours ſuitable to their obligation; who live the common life of the world, giving encouragement to liberty and corruption; and if they have but made their own neſt ſo well, as to be pretty ſecure againſt temporal want themſelves, think little of the ſpiritual neceſſities of their neighbours, or of being faithful to the many great duties of their ſtate: Can theſe ever expect the happy welcome of *Euge ſerve bone et fidelis!* Deliver me, O God, and all my brethren, the paſtors of thy church, from this fatal blindneſs; and by the power of thy Spirit, having removed theſe evils, make us faithful to our charge.

Paſtors then are to be faithful; but what is this to the people? Yes, it is to them: For as it is required of paſtors that they be faithful, ſo the ſame is required of the people; and if the paſtor be faithful, and the people

not, the paſtor's fidelity will be the aggravation of their crimes: If he carefully labours to inform them of their duty, and they take no care to learn; if he lays before them maxims of the goſpel in their purity, and preſſes to live by the Spirit of Chriſt, and they attend to the maxims of the world, and follow the practices and liberties of men, his fruitleſs labours will prove their judgment, and they ſhall not only give an account of their own ſins, but likewiſe of all the ſeed and care that has been loſt upon them. The people therefore are to be faithful, as well as the paſtor.

And this ſtill on another account: For tho' paſtors have the charge of diſpenſing the myſteries of God, and for this reaſon are to be faithful; yet all others, of what condition ſoever, have their charge under God too, have a truſt repoſed in them, and therefore are likewiſe to be faithful to him, to whom they muſt all render an account how they have ſatisfied their truſt. Magiſtrates, and all in office and power, have a charge under God of adminiſtring juſtice, and anſwering all the obligations they have undertaken; and if theſe make their employments ſubſervient only to their intereſt, ſeek only to enrich themſelves, let human reſpects, favour, or party, be the rule of their conduct; how

are they faithful to their truſt? Here it is, judges, juſtices, counſellors, advocates, attorneys, collectors, overſeers of the poor, guardians, executors, truſtees, &c. are in particular to examine their management; for as far as theſe act without regard to juſtice and truth, biaſed by any private conſideration; as far as any parties concerned ſuffer through their ſloth or neglect, ſo far are they faithleſs to their duties, and muſt anſwer it to the ſupreme Overſeer, who keeps an exact regiſter of all their proceedings, where their own unjuſt gain, and the loſſes of others, will appear in judgment againſt them. Again, Huſband and wife have a charge under God of each other; and both, of their children and ſervants; every houſe-keeper a charge of their family; ſhop-keepers are to be faithful to thoſe they deal with; workmen and labourers to thoſe who employ them; ſchool-maſters to their ſcholars; children to their parents; and all manner of ſervants to their maſters. Each ſtate has its particular obligations reſpectively belonging to it; and it is not ſufficient for Chriſtians to obſerve the general duties, in which all are concerned, ſet down in the commandments, but they are to be exact too in ſatisfying all ſuch obligations which their profeſſion or ſtate brings on them, as they ſtand recorded in the epiſtles

of holy writ, where St. *Paul* lays before every one the duties of their ſtate, and requires them to be faithful in them. 'Tis for want of this care there are ſo many who, according to the general method of their lives, ſeem not to offend directly againſt any one of the commandments, and therefore have the reputation of good Chriſtians; and yet at the ſame time are very great ſinners, in being notoriouſly wanting to the obligations of their condition, are ill parents, careleſs maſters, wicked truſtees, unjuſt ſtewards, &c.

And now, though there cannot well be any, who are not thus particularly engaged ſome way or other, either as *parents*, *maſters*, &c.: Yet if there be ſuch who think themſelves exempt, let them remember they have a charge ſtill, in which they are to be faithful; a charge of their *time*, of their *eſtate*, of their *health*, and of their *ſoul*: Theſe they have in truſt, and 'tis required of them to be juſt and faithful in this their charge: And tho' they may think they have but little to do, I think they have more to do than any; it being a difficult taſk for people who have no employment, to be faithful to their truſt; ſince their whole life is a continual temptation, both as to miſpending their *time* and *money*, and doing injury to the health both of *body* and *ſoul*: And I fear there are none leſs

prepared to give an account of these, than they who enjoy the largest share of them; and yet they are things of which they must one day give an account: And how shall they do this, if they are not faithful in them? We beseech thee therefore, O God, to teach all thy faithful this lesson, that they may seriously consider all they have received from thee, and likewise the full extent of all the trust and charge they hold under thee: Give to pastors and people grace and strength proportioned to their several duties, that overcoming all difficulties, they may be found faithful when summoned to give up their accounts to thee.

Fourth Sunday of ADVENT.

GOSPEL.

Luke iii. 1, ends verſe 6.

JOHN *came preaching the baptiſm of penance for the remiſſion of ſins.* It is an account the evangeliſt gives of St. *John the Baptiſt*, who was ſent to prepare the world for receiving Chriſt: He came preaching the baptiſm of penance, calling upon all to forſake their evil ways, and do penance for their ſins, that ſo they might be in a diſpoſition for partaking of the mercy deſigned them at the coming of the Meſſias; for that the end of Chriſt's coming being to make war againſt ſin, and triumph over it by his death, they could not be fitted for his coming, who were engaged in an intereſt quite oppoſite to his. If this was the preparation then, it muſt be ſo now; for Chriſt being the ſame yeſterday and to-day, the diſpoſition is the ſame which at all times is required in thoſe who deſire to find the benefit of his coming. The preaching, therefore, of St. *John* muſt be heard in our days, and all muſt do penance.

It is so far heard and observed, that it is a general practice of Christians at this time to prepare for the worthy celebration of the approaching festival, by going to the Sacrament of Penance; and if they do it so as to obtain pardon of their sins, they answer the summons of the *Baptist*, and will not be disappointed as to other effects, which will be the reward of their labours. But here is the point, to perform this duty in such a manner that the pardon of their sins may be the fruit of their endeavours; for I cannot but fear, that in many Christians, custom or neglect so far takes from them the true sense of their duty, that they lose the benefit of the best institutions; and while they seem to go to the fountains of mercy, return with the increase of their sins, and the wrath of God provoked against them, by the abuse of his goodness.

This misfortune cannot be prevented, but by a careful performance of this great duty to which we are now called, with a due regard to every part of the Sacrament of penance. The examination must be made with diligence, so as not only to call over the grosser faults, and such as are observable to every eye; but likewise to search into all the passions, look under all their folds, and be most inquisitive into those which pride

and ſelf-love are moſt ſolicitous to keep undiſcovered. Beſides the violation of general duties, the obligation of particular ſtates are to be brought to a ſtrict examination; and the argument of innocence muſt not be taken from the practice or cuſtom of others like themſelves, but from the will of God delivered in the commandments, and expounded by Chriſt in the goſpel; becauſe cuſtom, even of thoſe reputed good, ſeems to authorize many things which the goſpel diſapproves. But while this examen is made with care, there muſt be a care too, that this diligence in ſearching be not confounded with anxiety, and an endleſs ſolicitude. This is a caution neceſſary for thoſe, whoſe melancholy or exceſſive fears are too forward in multiplying difficulties, and under the pretext of a ſtricter ſearch, raiſe ſuch a darkneſs as takes away their ſight. Wherefore the rule of doing all with moderation muſt take place here, ſo that there be no wilful omiſſion, through ſloth or neglect, nor any confuſion raiſed by the impertinencies of a reſtleſs and unſatisfied fear.

The examination of conſcience being duly made, the Chriſtian is not preſently to run to his confeſſor; he is to remember that contrition is to go before confeſſion; and for this end, after his examination, muſt make it the buſineſs of his whole ſoul, to raiſe in

his heart a ſincere deteſtation of all his ſins; and this being a particular gift of God, he ought to ſeek it by earneſt prayer, beſeeching God to change his heart, turn it from all evil, and confirm him with ſuch a reſolution of amendment, that he may rather chuſe death, than return to his ſins. And here the penitent ought to be watchful againſt deluſion; for it being eaſy at ſuch a time to think of a change, to ſee the reaſonableneſs of it, and to have the ſpirit ſenſibly touched with the horror of paſt ſins; it is very eaſy miſtaking theſe motions of the thoughts and ſpirit for a real change of the heart, when, it may be, nothing of all this has reached it; but notwithſtanding theſe promiſing appearances, it may ſtill be a ſlave to its former diſorders, and only have its chains for the preſent hid with ſmoke. I do not intend by this to put penitents into a total diſtruſt of what they do, but only deſire they would not be too haſty in concluding their work to be done; but that having a true ſenſe of how great and difficult a work it is, for the heart to be changed from the love of evil to the love of good, they would take time and pains in it, and not only think of it, or let it be the ſubject of a few weak and paſſing deſires; but with all the earneſtneſs of their ſouls, beg it of heaven,

and back their prayers with the tears and ſighs of a heart proſtrate before God, under the ſenſe of its great miſery and poverty, and of the neceſſity of his grace, for the effecting the deſired change.

In this point conſiſts the beſt preparation for abſolution, and therefore not to be paſſed over lightly by any who own themſelves ſinners, and deſire to make their peace with God: But, however, the method ought to be very different in thoſe Chriſtians who are ſubject only to ordinary failings, or by accident have been ſurpriſed into ſome greater ſin; and in others, who find themſelves engaged in vice, and their hearts diſordered with an habitual affection to ſin: For theſe latter cannot be ſincere in their repentance, nor ſerious in their grief for what is paſt; except with the publicans and ſoldiers, who, upon the *Baptiſt*'s preaching penance, came to him, and aſked this queſtion, *Quid ergo faciemus? What therefore muſt we do?* Except, I ſay, they aſk this queſtion, and conſider it well with themſelves, and their director: Becauſe no repentance can be ſincere, but in proportion to the abhorrence of paſt diſorders, and the reſolutions of amendment; and how can theſe reſolutions be ſincere, if, being engaged in evil, they conſider not the violence of their paſſions, the ſtrength of

their diſorder, and what pains and means may be neceſſary for overcoming and bringing them under government?

Theſe cannot but ſee a great change is to be wrought in their hearts, and that for effecting it, there muſt be a neceſſity of many ſelf-denials, of much prayer and reading, of avoiding many occaſions that lead them into evil, of great watchfulneſs, and of often conſulting their ſpiritual phyſician: If then the work they ſeem to undertake is a work of difficulty, and they neither take it into conſideration themſelves, nor aſk of others what they have to do, or what is neceſſary for accompliſhing it, it is moſt certain there can be no ſincerity in their thoughts of amendment, and all the appearance of grief for paſt ſins is only counterfeit, and like a houſe without a foundation, built on the ſands, which cannot ſtand.

Wherefore, all in theſe unhappy circumſtances are obliged ſeriouſly to conſider this point, and from it may ſee too much grounds to fear, that if, in going to the Sacrament of Penance, they pretend to grieve for paſt ſins, without laying the axe to the root, they do nothing of what the *Baptiſt* preſcribes, and the abſolution they receive can have no effect: And what then muſt be the conſequence of their communions in this ſtate,

but what St *Paul* declares, of eating and drinking damnation to themſelves, without diſcerning the body of our Lord?

If there be a true contrition for ſin, it is to be hoped there will be nothing wanting in the other parts of this ſacrament. For this end, the penitent's rule muſt be, to lay open with ſincerity the true ſtate of his ſoul, without diſguiſing, excuſing, or concealing any thing that ought to be expreſſed: For if private conſiderations take place of duty; if pride, fear, or ſhame, ſtop the mouth of penitents, the ſame will ſtop the mercies of God; and the effect of ſuch confeſſions will be only to draw upon them the weight of new crimes, in abuſing holy things, in diſſembling with the miniſters of God, and lying to the Holy Ghoſt. And what a mockery are they made to the devil, who, upon pretext of ſhame, perſuades them to increaſe the matter of their ſhame? ſince if ever they think of finding mercy, they muſt not only mention what was before omitted, but likewiſe this their ſacrilegious diſſembling too.

There muſt be care likewiſe in performing the penance enjoined, and that in the true ſpirit of penance; for if there be delay, neglect, or forgetfulneſs in ſatisfying it, there is too much reaſon to ſuſpect ſuch Chriſtians to be wanting in the ſenſe of their paſt guilt,

and of the mercy of God, who is so easy in remitting it.

With these cautions ought all penitents to come at this time to the Sacrament of Propitiation, that so their souls being cleansed from sin, they may be prepared to meet their Redeemer in such a manner as to partake of his mercies, through which alone they can hope for salvation. Help us all, O God, in this point; grant us a sincere repentance of all our sins, and permit us not, either by neglect or dissembling, to pervert thy holy institutions; but that we may find life where thou hast commanded us to seek it.

Sunday within the Octave of CHRISTMAS.

EPISTLE.

Gal. iv. 1, ends verſe 7.

THE *fulneſs of time being come, God ſent his Son.* In this ſhort epiſtle St *Paul* lays before us the myſtery of man's redemption undertaken by Chriſt, and which we celebrate at this time: That God ſent his only Son, the ſecond perſon of the bleſſed Trinity, into the world; that he became man, took a body, not created immediately by the hand of God, as was that of *Adam*, but formed of a woman; that he was born an infant, was ſubject to the law made for ſinners; that he offered himſelf a ſacrifice for ſin, raiſed ſinners to the dignity of being the children of God, opened his breaſt and gave his Spirit to ſinners, and admitted his very enemies and murderers to be coheirs with him of his eternal inheritance. This is the bleſſing the patriarchs and prophets ſo many ages ſighed and prayed for, and which, being accompliſhed in the fulneſs of time, we

at present celebrate, but can never sufficiently adore; it being the wonderful effect of an infinite mercy, without any the least desert on our part. For all mankind universally lying under the guilt of sin, was by this rendered an enemy to God, and incapable of doing any thing whereby to make peace with him; and therefore, had he not been redeemed, must have been lost for ever. But what then! Would God have been less happy, if man had been for ever miserable? Or, if God had left man, as he did the fallen angels, under the eternal guilt of his sin, would this have lessened that infinite bliss which God essentially enjoys within himself? Nothing of all this: And therefore, as the leaving the unhappy angels in their sin was the effect of his justice; so his redeeming man from sin was the sole effect of his mercy. But then, to deliver up his Son to redeem a slave, to subject him to all the miseries of man, to expose him to a life of contempt and reproaches, to persecutions, torments, and the most ignominious death; this is the overflowing and excess of such an infinite mercy, that as we believe it without comprehending it, so, I fear, we celebrate the memory of it without seriously thinking of it, or returning the least part of that adoration and gratitude which we are truly obli-

ged to pay. If we did but once seriously reflect what it is to be running head-long into hell, and when on the very brink, consider the Son of God taking on him the punishment due to our sins, offering his most sacred blood as the price of our redemption from this state of misery; and not only rescuing us from eternal death, but even entitling us to everlasting happiness; this reflection would be sufficient to imprint a lasting sense of gratitude and love in our hearts, not to be forgotten under all the attempts of worldly flatteries or terrors, and sufficient to preserve us in a perpetual fidelity to so merciful a God, so loving a Redeemer: It is for this end the church has appointed this yearly solemnity, to encourage all her children, not only to glance at it in a passing thought, but to make it the more serious entertainment of their hearts all the eight days of this *octave;* and those who feel not a sense of it, ought to be confounded at least at their insensibility: The same ought to be renewed every day, as often as we bow at the most holy name of *Jesus*, letting this external respect be the expression and fruit of our inward love and adoration, so justly due to the mercies of our Redeemer: The same is daily suggested to us in the *Creed*, and St *John*'s *Gospel*; for why is it, that at the re-

peating those words, *He took flesh and was made man*: And, *The Word was made flesh*, both priest and people are commanded to kneel down, but only to be a continual remembrance of this great mercy, and excite in them all the sentiments of reverence and gratitude, the daily tribute of every true believer.

But more than this is expected from Christians; for since Christ redeemed us, that, as the apostle here says, we might become the adopted children of God, and receiving his Spirit, might in that cry, *Abba, Father*; every Christian ought to give proof of his redemption, by manifesting in his life this adoption, and that he lives by the Spirit of Christ: So that as those unhappy souls, who have not a knowledge or practical faith of this mystery, are directed wholly by the principles of corrupt nature, by the suggestions of flesh and blood, by self-love and the maxims of the world, and thus shew themselves the children of the first *Adam*; so true Christians ought so powerfully to be influenced by the rules of the gospel, in contradiction to all other inclinations, as to evidence the being of Christ's Spirit within them; and consequently, that they are the children of God. And is this the character of Christians? It is the scripture character of what they ought to

be. They are all obliged to adore God in this Spirit, to live by this Spirit, and walk by this Spirit: But ſo miſerable is the ſtate of Chriſtendom at preſent, that it is enough to draw ſighs and tears from all thoſe faithful ſouls who have any love for God or his church, to ſee ſuch an univerſal corruption amongſt them; that there are great numbers living in the open practice of vice, ſo as to be far beneath the degree of moral heathens; and that others, who have a horror of this wickedneſs, and pretend to piety, come yet ſo much ſhort of what they ought to be, that inſtead of living by the Spirit of Chriſt, they live by the ſpirit of ſelf-love and the world. Let but any one view the general method; how much there is every-where of uncharitableneſs, diſſenſions, and detractions; how great a zeal for intereſt and parties; how little for juſtice and truth; how all generally ſeek themſelves, admire vanity and follies, ſtudy their pleaſure and eaſe, neglect order and diſcipline in their families, avoid every thing that mortifies, and all works of penance; then obſerve the common exceſs, in tables, clothes, and furniture, &c. and tell me what there is in all this of the Spirit of Chriſt? or wherein a Chriſtian can truly ſay, *Abba, Father*, whilſt Chriſt is not the Father of any thing of this, but moſt certainly *ſelf-*

love and the *world?* Not that it can be expected, in this ſtate of corruption, a Chriſtian ſhould be wholly exempt from the effects of theſe evils; no, this is not a privilege even of the beſt; but yet ſo much is expected from them, as to have a diſlike of every degree of corruption to which they are ſubject, to lament this their miſery, humble themſelves under it, make war againſt it, and by holy exerciſes of piety and ſelf-denial, leſſen or weaken it what they are able. But as for living in the profeſſed practice of them, approving and ſupporting them, making the improvement of them their ſtudy, the ſubject of their thoughts, of their daily expence and entertainment, and thinking themſelves well in this profeſſion; all this is wholly diſagreeable to a chriſtian's Character, is not conformable to the principles of the goſpel and St. *Paul*, and has nothing of the Spirit of Chriſt in it; being the life of the natural man, but not of the ſpiritual: And while they thus far depart from the ways of Chriſt, following a rule which is not his, I deſire them ſeriouſly to conſider their ſtate, and earneſtly beg of God to eſtabliſh them in a more ſecure way, where the ſolid effects of their redemption may be more manifeſt in them.

Sunday

Sunday within the Octave of Chriſtmas.

GOSPEL.

Luke ii. 33. ends verſe 40.

BEhold he is ſet for the ruin and reſurrection of many in Iſrael, *and for a ſign which ſhall be contradicted.* Theſe words are part of *Simeon*'s prophecy concerning Chriſt, when he was brought, according to the *Jewiſh* law, by his parents into the temple; and, being inſpired by the Holy Ghoſt, oblige us to mix this feſtival of joy with fear; ſince we are here informed, that however Chriſt comes as a Redeemer, he ſhall not be for the reſurrection of all, but for the ruin of many. For have we not reaſon to fear, when we ſee ourſelves in hazard, not only from our own corruption, and the infinite ſnares of the world and the devil; but that there is ruin threatened even from him, in whom are centered all our hopes, and who has undertaken to ſave

us? While we rejoice therefore in this holy feſtival, let us fear too.

But how is he a Jeſus or Saviour, and yet ſet for the ruin of many? It is moſt certain, this can be no end of his coming, neither can this work of infinite mercy in the redemption of man, have a deſign of being the ruin of any. Whatever ruin therefore follows upon it, it muſt be charged upon the wickedneſs of man, in abuſing that, which God has intended for his good.

It muſt be charged on the obſtinacy of ſinners: The end of Chriſt's coming is to make war upon ſin, and by giving himſelf a ſacrifice, to deliver repenting ſinners from the guilt of their offences, and reverſe the ſentence pronounced againſt them. Here is ſalvation deſigned for all, and therefore all are called to forſake their ſins, that they may partake of the mercy: The only ruin is againſt ſin; and if this is to be deſtroyed, none can periſh, but thoſe alone who obſtinately adhering to ſin, chuſe to periſh with it, and be involved in the ruin. Sin here, in the redemption of man, is to be conſidered as *Sodom*, when the cry of its wickedneſs had aſcended to call for vengeance from heaven; and as *Lot*'s ſons in-law not obeying the ſummons of mercy, but chuſing to abide in the city, were con-

ſumed in its flames: So if thoſe here, who are mercifully invited to fly from ſin, becauſe it is to be deſtroyed, ſtand out obſtinate againſt this goodneſs, it is no leſs than their own choice, if they periſh with it. See then, Chriſtians, God declares war againſt ſin; the Son of God, the true angel of peace, publiſhes the ſentence pronounced againſt it, and gives his blood, that you may be exempt from the ruin: If you have a faith of thoſe flames that are prepared to conſume it, join yourſelves with *Lot*, and fly from *Sodom*, fly from ſin, forſake your evil ways; for otherwiſe the mercy of God will be no mercy to you; but being perverſe in ſin, you muſt fall with it, and bear a part in its ruins. And whence then is your ruin? Thy deſtruction is from thyſelf, O *Iſrael*. God calls to mercy, and you will not hear: Jeſus offers himſelf a ſacrifice for your redemption, and you refuſe to have a part in it: Is your ruin then from Chriſt, or from yourſelves?

And this ruin is particularly aggravated from the contempt of that mercy, which is offered for the redemption of ſinners. For though all obſtinate ſinners muſt unavoidably fall before the juſtice of God; yet thoſe certainly will find the greater dam-

nation, who have with ſtubbornneſs ſtood out againſt the greateſt mercies. This is ſufficiently declared in the goſpel, where Chriſt pronounces woes againſt *Capharnaum*, *Corozain* and *Bethſaida*, and ſays, it ſhall be more tolerable at the day of judgment for *Sodom*, than for them; becauſe they have made no advantage of the many wonders wrought in them, but ſtill continued in their ſins, notwithſtanding theſe attempts of mercy for their converſion. If then the increaſe of mercies adds to the weight of their crimes, who receive no benefit from them, may not we here comprehend how Chriſt may be ſet for the ruin of many; ſince knowing, how infinite is the mercy of his undertaking our redemption, and how very few there are, who lay hold of this mercy, it is plain the contempt of this goodneſs will be their greater ruin? Becauſe the goodneſs of God invites to repentance, and the ſtronger this invitation is, the greater is the obſtinacy of thoſe that reſiſt; wherefore they cannot fail, according to their hard and impenitent hearts, of heaping to themſelves anger in the day of wrath.

If none were in this danger, but thoſe whoſe incredulity and criminal lives ſeem to pronounce them already judged, it

might afford ſome comfort to others; but ſince the text in declaring Chriſt to be a ſign which ſhall be contradicted, ſeems to include all ſuch as walk not by the ſpirit of Chriſt, but in contradiction to it; we have all reaſon to fear, leſt we be involved in the ruin. For if with a conſiderate eye we look firſt on Chriſt, and then taking an impartial view of ourſelves, obſerve how far we depart from his humility, meekneſs, moderation, contempt of the world, and crucified life; nay, how far we ſet up and follow maxims quite oppoſite to his, ſuch as juſtify pride, intemperance, prodigality, the love of eaſe, of the world, and of ourſelves; and that according to theſe maxims, the greateſt part of chriſtians ſpend their time, their money, and their lives; have we not reaſon to ſuſpect our own ways, and ſee whether we be not carried away with the torrent of cuſtom, and received practices; and while we profeſs Chriſt, live not in contradiction to him? Chriſt is the Truth and the Way; and if this be not the truth and way we follow, but others, which the world has ſet up and commends; I cannot ſee, but with our ſuppoſed exemption from what is generally reputed vicious, we may be eaſily diſap-

pointed in our expectation, and there find our ruin, where we inconſiderately hope for life.

O God, how much have we to fear in this kind? We are on every ſide encompaſſed with bleſſings; thy mercies are daily calling upon us to repent; and in this myſtery of the birth of Chriſt, we ſee how ſolicitous thou art for our eternal good, whilſt thou offereſt thy only ſon for our mediator, and by his blood openeſt us a way to paradiſe. This thy infinite goodneſs ought to be a ſubject of our preſent thankſgiving and joy, in ſeeing how much thou valueſt our ſouls, how much in earneſt thou art for our happineſs. But, O God, how much more miſerable ſhall we be than all creatures, if we make no advantage of this thy mercy? How much more weighty will our damnation be, than that of the infidel world, than that of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, if notwithſtanding this chargeable purchaſe for our redemption, we ſtill continue obſtinate in our ſins? Permit not this evil, we beſeech thee, O Jeſus, but now plead ſtrongly for us, that we may have a true ſenſe of thy mercies, that theſe may awaken our drowſy ſouls, and inſpire us with reſolutions of eſpouſing thy intereſt and our own, in making war upon all that

is sinful, and never laying down our arms, till by thy example and help we become victorious, triumphing over the world, over sin and death: For 'tis thus only thy mercies will be our salvation, and not our ruin.

Sunday within the Octave of the Epiphany.

EPISTLE.

Rom. xii. 1. ends verſe 5.

CONform not yourſelves to this world: but be reformed in the newneſs of your ſpirit. This leſſon is often repeated, and it is nothing but what is neceſſary; it being a very difficult thing to live in the world, and not conform to it. Example and cuſtom are very powerful, and make ſtrong impreſſions on the ſoul; and for a chriſtian to perſuade himſelf not to do what he ſees almoſt every body do, is the ſame thing as to ſtand againſt the violence of a torrent; and yet it is in the midſt of this torrent every chriſtian is born, in this he is educated, and though he be not commanded to retire from it, yet he is commanded ſo to reſiſt it, as not to be carried away with it: *Nolite conformari huic ſæculo.* And were this obligation only in regard of notorious irregularities and ſcandalous vices, the taſk

were not ſo great, becauſe in this a chriſtian has the encouragement of great numbers, who ſo far eſpouſe the cauſe of virtue, as to oppoſe every thing that is openly contrary to it, and ſo they are a mutual help and ſupport to one another: But this duty extending yet farther, to ſuch diſorders, which are not reputed contrary to piety, and are the common practice of the greater number of chriſtians, who are eſteemed regular and virtuous; this makes the difficulty almoſt inſuperable, ſince by ſtanding againſt theſe, he neceſſarily draws on himſelf the odium of particularity and bigotry, and muſt by conſequence, be reputed to condemn all thoſe, who live in the practice of what, by avoiding, he cenſures, as not allowable in a follower of the goſpel. And yet this is the taſk a chriſtian muſt undertake; even this part he muſt ſtand againſt, as well as the former; not only reſiſting the profeſſed and open, but alſo the more hidden enemies of his ſalvation.

Amongſt theſe I reckon all ſuch chriſtians, who being no ways ſcandalous, are yet poſſeſſed with all the paſſions of the world, who admire honours and preferments, have their hearts and thoughts taken up with vanity, and the ſolicitude of pleaſing the world, have a love and

eſteem for things preſent, are fond of all divertiſements, ſtudy their own eaſe and convenience, are forgetful of the goods and evils of the next life, have a contempt for every thing that this world diſeſteems; in fine, have all their affections and thoughts of preſent happineſs regulated by the conformity every thing has either to the love of themſelves, or the opinion and eſteem of this world. All perſons whoſe juſt character this is, I cannot but look on as people conforming to the world, that is, doing the very thing St. *Paul* requires all good chriſtians to avoid: And though their number may be very great, and their reputation generally good, yet in as much as they take a courſe not agreeable to God's word, their authority and practice ought not to prevail on any, that tender their ſalvation, to tread over their ſteps; but their method is little leſs to be apprehended, than that of notorious offenders.

The reaſon is already hinted; becauſe it is declared againſt by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, the beſt guides to eternity; and if it be not expreſsly ſinful, is at leaſt ſuch as leads to ſin, and evidently hazards ſalvation; and therefore, as good parents, who are ſolicitous for their childrens good,

are not only careful to keep them out of the company of ſuch as are public criminals; but likewiſe from the converſation and familiarity of thoſe, who encourage liberty, and have no regard to any rules of order and diſcipline in their families; becauſe they know theſe are the ſteps to greater evils, and in ſuch company, their children receive ſuch ſeeds, which generally of courſe grow up into all manner of irregularities and ſcandals: So thoſe chriſtians, who are ſolicitous for their own eternal welfare, decline not only what is evidently ſinful, but whatever leads to it; becauſe they are ſenſible, this courſe carries them upon rocks and ſhelves, whence very few ever get off, but by ſhipwreck, and the loſs of all. For this reaſon, *David* is not content to declare his abhorrence of all open iniquity: *Iniquitatem odio habui & abominatus ſum:* But often repeats his petition to almighty God, beſeeching him to keep him out of the *way of iniquity: Viam iniquitatis amove a me:* And as often prays, that all his ſteps may be directed according to God's word; *Greſſus meos dirige ſecundum eloquium tuum.* For he knew, that not only *iniquity*, but likewiſe the *way of iniquity* is to be avoided by God's faithful ſervants; and that if all his ſteps were

not directed by God's word, he ſhould ſoon find himſelf out of the way. Now thus it is with all the ways of *ſelf-love* and the *world*; if they do not ariſe to that exceſs, as to be downright ſins; yet whoever walks in them without great caution, will ſoon find himſelf in the *way of iniquity*, in the way of departing from God; it being impoſſible for a man to ſerve and love two maſters: And if once a heart is poſſeſſed with the love of the world, admires its ſatisfaction and greatneſs; will not the world ſoon have the command of ſuch a ſoul? And how then will it ſerve and obey God? No, God will in the end be forſaken, and the world obeyed. And though this may not appear in every ſtep of this diſorder, yet it is what inſenſibly grows upon men, and the unwillingneſs they have of believing themſelves to be in the way of iniquity, is the occaſion of their going on in this way, till they are wholly ſeparated from God. 'Tis this deluſion, in compliance with their inclination to *themſelves* and the *world*, is the ruin of thouſands; and of ſo many great families, that are wholly loſt to piety and faith, I believe the greater part may owe all their miſcarriage to this inconſiderate blindneſs. They begin at firſt with the love of *vanity*

and *diverſions*, and look on this as nothing but what decency and health exact from them; they go on under this cover, till all *order* and *diſcipline* is loſt in themſelves and their families, and no moderation obſerved in their expences: Hence the *time of praying and reading in the evenings* is often given to company and entertainments; and ill hours in going to bed, oblige them to indulge themſelves in reſt and ſleep next morning; and it is well if they get to prayers by noon; and then, how eaſily are they diverted, or with what ſloth and indevotion are they performed? And all this while they ſay, Where is the ſin? Is it a ſin to play at cards? Is it a ſin to be in company? Is it a ſin to retire late, or to ſleep long when they want it? And if not ſinful, what need of mending it?

Unhappy chriſtians, to be thus running on to a precipice, and think yourſelves ſafe, becauſe you do not fall every ſtep you take! It is not by this way infinite numbers have miſerably periſhed? And ought not this to oblige to you to put a ſtop to this unhappy courſe, where you have ruin before you? Change but the caſe from your ſouls to your bodies, and obſerve there how far you are from this raſhneſs. If you hear but of a river, or a dangerous way

before you, where many have been loſt; upon attempting to paſs, you preſently cry out, *Hold, go back, take another way:* And why ſo, are you either drowning or falling? No; but if we go on, we ſhall ſoon come to this misfortune: Who will venture where ſo many have periſhed? And ought there not to be a like caution in the more important concern of your ſouls, where you have ſo great danger before you; and, it may be, not only danger, but if you examine ſtrictly, will likely find yourſelves living in ſuch a ſtate, as you cannot reaſonably judge ſafe to die in? For what is the whole method of your lives, but loving and ſeeking yourſelves? What is it but indulging fleſh and blood; gratifying your own corruption and weakneſs; indulging diſorderly and worldly paſſion? Where is the love of God? How do you love him with all your heart, and with all your ſtrength? How do you ſeek firſt the kingdom of God, and the things that are above? How do you walk in the newneſs of life? Where are you transformed into Chriſt? Where is his life manifeſted in yours? Where is the denial of yourſelves? Where is the worthy fruit of penance? And yet, is not this required of you? Is it not this the whole goſpel exacts from every chriſtian? Aſk not there-

fore, where is your ſin; for if you are not what chriſtians ſhould be, you cannot poſſibly pretend an exemption from it: There may be great ſins, without great crimes: To be free from theſe latter, may make a moral heathen; but it is not enough to make a good chriſtian. But this is a leſſon muſt be taught by thee, O God; thy powerful grace muſt prepare ſouls to receive it: For a general corruption has given ſuch authority to the *broad way*, that thy goſpel is now a ſcandal, not only to *Jews*, but (I fear) to *Chriſtians* alſo; who eaſily take offence at ſuch truths of thine, which agree not with their practice, and are like to make them uneaſy: Remedy this ſpreading evil, I beſeech thee; and ſince thou haſt commanded thy followers not to conform to this world, but to be reformed in the newneſs of ſpirit, awaken their ſouls, that they may truly underſtand it, and give them ſtrength ſincerely to practiſe it.

If the feaſt of the Epiphany *falls on a* Sunday, *there are proper inſtructions both for that day and the* Sunday *following, which is the* Octave, *in that part which contains inſtructions for the feſtivals.*

First Sunday after Epiphany, or within the Octave.

GOSPEL.

Luke ii. 42. to the End.

DID you not know I was to be in my Father's buſineſs? Theſe words are the anſwer Chriſt made his parents, when, after three days ſearch, they found him in the temple diſputing with the doctors; and contain many good inſtructions.

Firſt, To parents, from the occaſion on which they were ſpoken, in putting them in mind, how ſolicitous they ought to be for their children's good; and that if they take ſuch ways, which ſeem a withdrawing from their duty; they ought to look for them, and continue their ſearch with an untired patience: Perſeverance in ſuch endeavours, cannot fail of a bleſſing, if not in finding their children at length in the temple, at leaſt in other rewards of their charity; whilſt all that will be the increaſe of their own crown, which was

deſigned for their children: And will be ſo far ſatisfactory, as to give them hopes, that if the childrens diſorders have been occaſioned by their indiſcretion or neglect, they have by this pious induſtry, made their beſt ſatisfaction for whatever injury was done them. No parents can have aſſurance, that their paſſions, ill example, or affected overſights, have not prepared their children for all the irregularities to which they are ſubject: And is it not then reaſon they ſhould labour in reclaiming them, if not in charity to their children, at leaſt for their own ſakes; that ſo they may ſatisfy for what is paſt, and prevent their childrens damnation being theirs too!

Secondly, To children, by informing them, that though the duty to parents be very great, ſuch as ought not to be tranſgreſſed; yet, if the will of their parents evidently interferes with the will of God, they are bound to do rather the will of God, than of man; becauſe, they being the children of God, both by creation, and by adoption in baptiſm, his right is infinitely above that of nature, and the authority of earthly parents ceaſes, in concurrence with that of God. Hence it is, that when God calls to the temple, and

to truth, and the vice or errors of parents oppoſe their authority againſt it, nature muſt yield to God; and whatever difficulties are raiſed by tenderneſs or love, they muſt be all overcome, in obedience to his commands, who will not allow of nature to put in caveats againſt his orders: And if any take offence from this proceeding, they muſt anſwer for their own ſcandal; it being a ſufficient juſtification for children, that if they love father or mother more than Chriſt, they cannot be his diſciples. Chriſt ſays, he came to ſeparate father from ſon, and daughter from mother: Such a ſeparation therefore ought not to be a ſurprize, when juſtice or truth obliges to it; and if the world begins to queſtion it, the childrens anſwer muſt be, *Neſciebatis, quia in his quæ Patris ſunt, oportet nos eſſe? Did you not know, we are to be in our Father's buſineſs?* However, when there is a neceſſity for this diviſion, children ought to do all with that tenderneſs and reſpect, as to give demonſtration to their parents, that they do violence to nature, and that nothing but their duty to God, could put them upon this ſo diſagreeable a method.

Thirdly, To all chriſtians, in preſſing them to an exactneſs in performing whatever duties belong to God. For Chriſt

in the temple three days after the feſtival was ended, is a reproof of their coldneſs and indifferency, who think all times of prayer tedious; and therefore, when called to the worſhip of God, or to family prayer, or other exerciſes of devotion, ever find buſineſs for delay, that ſo ſome part may be over, before they appear; and then at the end are ever upon the ſtart to take their flight, as if afraid to over-do. Now, though it muſt be owned, that ſometimes there may be hinderance of buſineſs, ſuch as cannot well be diſpenſed with; and that to ſome it may look like a matter of indifferency, to be wanting in things ſo very inconſiderable, as long as they fail not in any ſubſtantial duty; yet I dare boldly aſſert it, and let experience determine the truth, that wherever there are perſons who are generally ſlow in going to prayer, and the firſt in leaving it, who eaſily find buſineſs to excuſe them from hearing inſtructions, reading good books, and going to the ſacraments, that ſuch perſons, I ſay, are not what they ſhould be, but are wanting in the ſubſtantial part of a chriſtian, in not having a ſenſe or love of God in their hearts, and that they are not truely in earneſt in the buſineſs of their ſalvation.

It is the general anſwer of careleſs chriſtians, to make their excuſe, that they have not time, through the exceſs and variety of buſineſs; and yet if they are obſerved, I believe it will be commonly found, they do much leſs buſineſs than others; that a general ſloth makes them lazy in all they undertake; that having not time to pray, they find time for more ſleep and idle converſation, above their neighbours; that when it is to ſatisfy their own humour, or prepare for ſome merriment, they know how to contrive and diſpatch buſineſs, which always ſtands in their way when eternity calls upon them. And have not they hence reaſon to ſuſpect themſelves, if not conclude, that a vicious ſloth is their clog; and becauſe they are not earneſt in their father's buſineſs, they find ſo many pretexts to excuſe them from it?

A laſt may be to all in trouble; that if they begin to fear God is departed from them, they would ſeek him again with the induſtry of an untired hope, without giving over their ſearch, although they ſeem for a time to have laboured in vain. It is a uſual trial of his beſt ſervants, to ſeem wholly to withdraw himſelf from them; and this in pious ſouls, cannot fail

of raiſing fears and diſquiets. But what muſt they do? They are to moderate theſe, as well as they can; they are to wait upon God with patience; they are to ſeek him in the temple, and amidſt the many motives to dejection, learn to hope, with *Abraham*, even againſt hope. It is in this trial, is given the beſt proof of a faithful ſervant; for though in perſecution there are many ſharper trials, yet generally that which is their ſeverity, ſoon puts an end to them; and God ſeldom fails of ſupporting thoſe his ſervants with interior comforts, which afford both ſtrength and ſweetneſs under their ſufferings; beſides that knowing the cauſe, for which they ſuffer, they have in this the ſatisfaction, that it is not the anger of God, but his mercy, that by this way calls them to a crown. But here in this trial of interior darkneſs, the chriſtian is deprived of all comforts, prayer gives no refreſhment, the beſt exerciſes of devotion ſeem fruitleſs, his endeavours for amendment are barren; God, on whom he deſires to depend, ſeems wholly to have withdrawn himſelf, ſo that, although he ſeeks, he cannot find him; and then ſuſpects, that all this proceeds from the anger of God: This altogether, with the long continuance of the evil, renders his caſe very afflicting,

and obliges him to make uſe of all his patience and faith, to carry him through it. And with theſe he muſt go on, with the help of a good guide, waiting in the temple till God ſhall pleaſe to return, and with new comforts give relief to his oppreſſed mind.

In theſe leſſons we ſee ſome of thoſe many infirmities, to which we are ſubject in this life, and the neceſſary dependence we have on God, for his directing and ſupporting grace. And now, O God, we beſeech thee, give proof of thy mercy, in aſſiſting all concerned, according to their neceſſities. Be a guide to parents in their difficult charge, that by remiſneſs of diſcipline, miſtaken love, or ill example, they lay not ſeeds of damnation in thoſe whom they have brought into this world. Give children a docile ſpirit, that by a ſteady ſubmiſſion to their parents care, they may be delivered from the ſnares of the world, of their own paſſions and indiſcretion; and let nothing but the manifeſtation of thy will, be an exception to this duty. Inſpire us all with a zeal for thy law, and the diſcharge of all the obligations of a chriſtian ſtate; deliver us from ſpiritual coldneſs and ſloth, and from hearkening to their pretended diſpenſations

in our duty, ſuch as will not be allowed by thee. Send comfort to all thoſe, who are under dejection of ſpirit; give them patience and courage, that they faint not under their burthen; but let thy heavenly light return again to them, that while they ſeek, they may ſee thy promiſe accompliſhed in finding thee, and bleſs thy goodneſs for ever.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

EPISTLE.

Rom. xii. 6. ends verſe 16.

THIS epiſtle is an abridgement of all chriſtian duties; to read it over and conſider it, is ſermon enough for one day, and may ſerve for the meaſure of a chriſtian life. Happy they who live up to it; but they cannot be ſo, who take no care to obſerve it. Let all then be attentive, and examine themſelves, as they go along, for none can pretend to be unconcerned; and as often as they deſire to know the true ſtate of their Souls, let them come to this rule.

The firſt thing required is general; That all chriſtians would conſider the ſtate, wherein God has placed them; as likewiſe thoſe gifts and graces, they have received, ſo as to be faithful in the good uſe of them, and ſolicitous to diſcharge well that particular duty, to which every one is called. It is meddling with other peoples concerns, and the neglect of our own

own, is the occaſion of great miſcarriages and diſorders; and whoever deſigns ſeriously either quiet of mind, or to be free from diſtracting thoughts, or to perform well the obligations of their ſtate, muſt firſt conſider what thoſe obligations are, then make them their buſineſs; and having fixed theſe bounds, paſs them not, except only when *neceſſity* or *charity* diſpenſes with them: All beyond this is generally nothing but the effects of curioſity, or a buſy temper, and greatly prejudices that freedom of mind neceſſary for the due performance of all ſpiritual and temporal duties: For all diſſipation of thoughts being the chriſtian's hinderance, the occaſion of it ought to be cut off as much as may be, and ever be reſiſted as a temptation. Our unavoidable diſtractions are too many; there is no need of adding to them.

This advice is by the Apoſtle firſt applied to Paſtors; That they would confine themſelves to their miniſtry; not charging themſelves with the adminiſtration of temporal affairs, or ſecular employs; but wholly take up their time and thoughts, in *expounding*, *inſtructing*, and *exhorting*. The ignorance and vice of the world make the practice of theſe duties indiſpenſable; and they who have undertaken this charge,

and either omit them through ſloth, or let other affairs take place, are not paſtors, but idols: *Os habent, & non loquuntur.*

Then it is applied to all, who have any ſort of ſuperiority; That they would be ſolicitous in ſatisfying the reſpective obligations they have taken on them. Here all magiſtrates, officers, parents, maſters are concerned; there being not one of theſe characters, which brings not a burthen with it, extending their care beyond themſelves; and if their ſolicitude be not of equal extent with their obligation, they are wanting in their duty, are not juſt and faithful ſervants, and therefore cannot be good chriſtians.

The apoſtle then gives direction in particular duties belonging to all chriſtians,

1. As to giving of alms: *Qui tribuit in ſimplicitate:* Requiring all diſtribution of charity to be performed, not on human reſpects, or for vanity, but in ſingleneſs of heart, regarding God alone, and the neceſſity of our neighbour. Hence thoſe, who have the diſpoſing of any common collection, the recommending to hoſpitals or funds, or benefices, *&c.* ought to have this eſſential quality of doing all with ſimplicity of heart; letting thoſe take place, who are beſt qualified, and come neareſt

the deſign of the giver: For if any *favour* or *intereſt* determines the choice, this is not what is preſcribed, but double dealing. And as for ſuch, who being in *truſt* for the poor, as *collectors*, or *overſeers*, and either enrich themſelves by their ſtock, turning it to their own advantage by defrauding them; or expend any part of it (beyond what is ſtrictly allowed) in treats and taverns, and ſet the charge of their entertainments on the poor's ſcore, this muſt be an abomination before God, and an injuſtice, againſt which the cries of the poor call aloud for revenge. St. *Paul* adds to this, that all voluntary alms, and works of mercy, ought to be done with a *cheerful heart*, *Qui miſeretur in hilaritate.* It ought to be a joy to chriſtians, that God will accept of them to be the inſtruments of his providence, in aſſiſting his ſervants and children; and that by this, they have a means of exchanging their temporal goods for eternal: It is a double mercy to relieve the diſtreſſed by alms, and comfort them in the manner of doing it. All ſharpneſs and harſhneſs to the poor is in this condemned; they are to be helped with cheerfulneſs; and when refuſed, it muſt be done with ſweetneſs: They give an alms, who compaſſionate them, if they cannot otherwiſe aſſiſt them.

2. He requires, that all chriſtians, in their friendſhip and love to one another, be ſincere, without diſſembling, flattery, or deſign of intereſt: That they regard one another, as having God for their father, and being all members of Jeſus Chriſt.

3. That they have a horror of all that is evil, and a love for all good: For how can they be faithful ſervants of Chriſt, if they eſpouſe not his intereſt, or abandon him to gratify themſelves?

4. That they have charity for every neighbour, and a tenderneſs truly fraternal: This ought to be holy, as being a branch of the love of God, and therefore not to be corrupted with unbecoming and ſenſual familiarities; it ought to be humble, and therefore ever watchful to prevent others in the common teſtimonies of deference and honour.

5. That they be vigilant in every duty, and fervent in ſpirit; becauſe they ſerve God in whatever they do; they ſerve him, whoſe eye is ever upon them; and ſloth or neglect can never prevail, but they muſt be wanting to juſtice or charity.

6. That they have always comfort in the hope of eternal life; and therefore a chriſtian's principal ſatisfaction ought not to be in the agreeable ſweetneſs of friendſhip,

nor in the enjoyments or goods of this life; but in the hopes and expectation of the goods to come: And the comfort grounded on this hope is not to be loſt in the midſt of tribulation and diſtreſs: *In tribulatione Patientes;* the proſpect of eternity muſt take off from the weight of theſe momentary evils, and be the ſupport of a ſoul, till its deliverance comes.

7 They muſt be fervent in prayer: *Orationi inſtantes:* Becauſe it is by this holy exerciſe they are to obtain of God what they want: One would think the neceſſity of our condition, the uncertainty of our ſtate; our circumſtances of having an eternity before us, without any poſſibility of returning, if once we miſs our way, *&c.* ſhould oblige us to attention, conſtancy, and fervour in our prayer, for the obtaining help of him, by whoſe grace and power alone, we can be ſecure againſt the dangers of our ſtate. But here is the ſubject of our miſery and confuſion: We know our own weakneſs, and infinite neceſſities, and yet are ſo ſtupid as not to aſk for help, let every trifling fancy take off our thoughts from this ſo great concern; and too often, by our irreverence and indevotion, ſhut his hands againſt us, of whom we pretend to aſk for relief. It is an afflicting thought to

conſider, how many provocations are given to God at the very altar, the very place of mercy; and to reflect on the great indecencies in the congregation in time of publick worſhip, is enough to believe, that great numbers, who come there, leave their reaſon and faith behind them: For who can imagine, that has either, that ſenſual gazing, idle tattling, and deſigned vanities, are becoming entertainments of ſouls in their addreſſes to God! Or can theſe expect bleſſings, who in their way of ſeeking them, exaſperate him who is to be the giver? Theſe go to the place of prayer, but certainly without a ſenſe of their neceſſities, or of their dependence on God; and being ſo far from what the apoſtle requires, are in danger of carrying back curſes inſtead of bleſſings; and where then ſhall theſe find pardon, who thus before the mercy ſeat increaſe the number of their ſins? Fervent prayer is the exerciſe of chriſtians; but where is the chriſtianity in the practice of this intolerable inſolence?

8. They are to relieve the neceſſities of God's ſervants, and practiſe hoſpitality: How does this agree with expenſive entertainments? If ſpending money to feed our vices, ſupport our liberties, and ſatisfy the diſordered inclinations of our curioſity,

vanity, ambition, and ſenſual appetites, had been commanded, I ſee how faithful chriſtians would have been in obſerving it. But when theſe corrupt ways devour now what is commanded to be given to the neceſſitous and ſtrangers, it may be eaſily imagined, what accounts theſe will make up, who practiſe it: Let them have a care they be not caſt out with thieves and murderers; their profeſſion and ſin being much the ſame.

9. They are to bleſs thoſe that perſecute them: Animoſities, malice, hatred, imprecations, and ill wiſhes, are to be renounced by the followers of Jeſus, who died praying for his perſecutors: And yet how much is there of this corruption amongſt thoſe who ſay, they follow him!

10. They are to partake of the comforts and afflictions of their neighbours, be united in the ſame ſentiments; not ſeek what is eſteemed great in this world, but accommodate themſelves to what is reputed mean and humble.

Theſe are ſome principal duties recommended by St. *Paul* to all chriſtians; and yet, O God, in how very few are they found? All have the name, but few the practice of what they undertake. It ought to be the ſubject then of this day's exer-

cise, to examine ourselves by this holy rule, and truly resolve to use our best endeavours in order to our conforming to it. It is something to read and think, but without doing more, our work will only be thought of, but never done.

Second Sunday after EPIPHANY.

GOSPEL.

John ii. 1. ends verſe 11.

JESUS was invited to the marriage, and his diſciples. Chriſt was preſent at this marriage feaſt, to honour and ſanctify this ſtate of life, and to inform the faithful, that they ought not to engage in it, without inviting him to the marriage, that is, that they ought not to undertake and proceed in it, on motives purely human, temporal, and carnal, becauſe this is to forbid him being preſent, inſtead of inviting him to it; but that they are to conſult him in the choice they make, conſider principally thoſe circumſtances, which may render them capable of living in his ſervice, and obſerve all thoſe conditions which the church preſcribes. It is by this purity of intention Chriſt is invited to the marriage; and without this, it cannot be expected, that he ſhould give the benediction of his grace, nor concur in remedying thoſe inconveniences, which almoſt unavoidably happen in this ſtate; as

he did this here mentioned in the want of wine.

It is too much to expect, that married perſons ſhould live exempt from diſlikes, contentions or jealouſies; and many difficulties cannot fail of giving them diſturbance, either from difference of humours, from diſagreeable paſſions, from indiſcretions, or the following ſuch ways, as are unwarrantable and deſtructive of the common intereſt: And what is there to be depended on but only that grace, which Jeſus Chriſt gives to thoſe who call him to the marriage? It is this alone can prevent theſe inconveniencies from growing to an exceſs, or give them ſtrength to go through them with the patience and courage of chriſtians. And how can they hope for this, who binding themſelves in an engagement of this concern, without ever conſulting him, and marrying without his orders, do in effect declare, that they believe themſelves in no want of his aſſiſtance for ſatisfying the obligations, and bearing the difficulties of their ſtate? It muſt be nothing leſs than an extraordinary mercy, if he leaves them not to themſelves and their paſſions, and to all thoſe inconveniences which are ſo frequent in a married life, and permits not in his juſtice, that what they with ſo much ear-

neſtneſs ſought for their temporal advantage, may prove their puniſhment, and even hell in this world, and be the way to another that is eternal.

But the inſtruction of Jeſus at this marriage feaſt reaches beyond this ſtate, and informs chriſtians, that though the profeſſion of virginity, and a religious life, has many advantages in it, ſuch as prepare the undertakers for the more frequent preſence, and ſtricter union with Chriſt; yet there is no lawful ſtate, or buſineſs of life, even of perſons engaged in the world, in which Chriſt will not be preſent, and give his benediction to it, if thoſe concerned are but ſolicitous to invite him to it. We have an encouragement for this practical belief, from the many inſtances ſet down in holy writ, of perſons who have found Chriſt, and had both the comfort and bleſſing of his ſacred preſence. *Peter*, with ſome other of the apoſtles, found him, whilſt engaged in their trade of fiſhing; *Zaccheus* found him on the road, the *Samaritan* woman at the well, when ſhe was fetching water for her family; the blind man when he was begging; the ſick man, near the pond ſide taking care for his health; *Magdalen* at an entertainment; the lame man in the temple, and thoſe mentioned in this goſpel, at their marriage.

And what were all theſe occurrences? Not the effect of chance, but the appointments of providence, for the comfort of chriſtians in all conditions, that they might not diſquiet themſelves under any circumſtances, as if they were not in a way of finding Chriſt, or working out their ſalvation; but to be their aſſurance, that if the hurry of neceſſary buſineſs gives little opportunity for prayer or recollection, yet they may find Chriſt preſent with them, even in their buſineſs, if they will be but ſolicitous to invite him; the tradeſman may find him in his ſhop, the labourer at his work, the plowman in the field, the porter in the ſtreets, the traveller on the road, the ſervant in the kitchen, at the waſh-bowl or ſpit, thoſe that are ſick by their bedſide, and the afflicted in all their diſtreſs.

All this depends only on good management, and it being ſo much the chriſtian's intereſt to learn it, eſpecially of thoſe, who are obliged to labour, I wiſh they would take St. *Francis Sales* for their maſter, who in his *Introduction*, *part* iii. *chap.* 35, teaches this leſſon ſo well, that the beſt advice I can give them, is to read it every week, that ſo they may become perfect in it, and make this advantage of all their labours, as not only to work for bread, but alſo for a better recompence, which is life everlaſting.

The method of practiſing it, muſt be in making an offering of every thing they do to God. He that has ſo expreſly declared the acceptance of the widow's mite, and the value of a cup of cold water given in his name, has in this put it beyond all doubt, that there is nothing in itſelf ſo inconſiderable, but, if undertaken and performed in his name, will be accepted by him, in order to the obtaining from him an eternal recompence. And if every thing, even the ordinary actions of human life, as of eating and drinking, according to St. *Paul*'s advice, may be thus conſecrated to God, and have a part in the purchaſe; with much more reaſon, may the labours of thoſe, that work daily for bread, be brought under this head. For however ſtraitneſs of fortune may render them neceſſary; yet they may be undertaken, *Firſt*, as a charity due to themſelves or family; *Secondly*, As an act of juſtice, to ſatisfy the obligation they have of providing for thoſe under their care: And theſe being duties enjoined them by God himſelf, they may the more eaſily be begun in his name, and be offered to him, as a ſacrifice of obedience to his commands. And if they take all poſſible care to be faithful in them, this fidelity muſt have place among chriſtian virtues, and is

one of thoſe, to which Chriſt has promiſed a reward; for he that ſhall be faithful in ſmall matters, ſhall be ſet over greater.

And ſince all ſervices, and laborious employments, have ſomething difficult in them, whether it be in the labour itſelf, or in the circumſtances of giving attendance to it, as in early riſing, or ſitting up late, or in tedious waiting, or in denying nature many ſatisfactions, to which it is inclined, and others take; or in ſerving nice and diſagreeable humours, or in undeſerved reproofs, or in being ſubject to impertinencies, or in croſs accidents, *&c.* there is not one of theſe, which may not be embraced, in compliance with the will of God, be made the exerciſe of daily patience and humility, and be accepted as a penance of their ſins due from the juſtice of God.

Now if chriſtians would learn this leſſon, is it not plain, that in doing only that, to which they are otherwiſe obliged, they would make their lives the exerciſe of the greateſt virtues, of charity, juſtice, patience, humility and penance: And who can doubt, but that Chriſt would be then with them, to give a bleſſing to their labours, and make them a ſacrifice acceptable to God? Thus certainly it might be: And is it not a matter of pity, that this leſſon is not more univerſally practiſed

amongſt ſervants, and labouring chriſtians; who live generally ſo little concerned for their greateſt intereſt, that working hard all the year for poor wages, they offer nothing of what they do, to him, who has promiſed to be more bountiful in his rewards; and that having received their wages, they have all they can expect? This is very ill huſbandry, ſuch as we have all too much reaſon to lament in ourſelves; and we cannot do better this day, than beg a remedy for it. Help us therefore, O God, and teach us to be wiſe; that having ſo many opportunities every day, of making offerings to thee, both of what we do, and what we ſuffer, we may improve the occaſions for our eternal advantage: It is a wonder of thy goodneſs; that thou wilt accept any thing from ſuch unworthy offerers: But our ſloth and indifferency is a greater wonder, that thou being ever ready to accept, we are generally ſo very unmindful of making our offerings to thee, when all the advantage too is to be our own. What can we then do, but bewail our blindneſs, and beſeech thee, O Jeſus, to be ever with us in all we do, that all our actions and ſufferings being ſanctified by thy preſence, we may learn to turn all to the honour of our God, and the Salvation of our ſouls.

Third Sunday after Epiphany.

EPISTLE.

Rom. xii. 16. ends verſe 21.

THIS is a continuation of the foregoing Epiſtle, and the ſubject of it are other duties, which ought to be the practice of every chriſtian.

The Firſt, is a recommendation of interior humility: That the chriſtian be careful, not to be wiſe in his own opinion: *Nolite eſſe Prudentes apud voſmetipſos.* Men are very different in their capacities and abilities; and yet it is permitted to none to glory in the advantage they have above their neighbours, ſince whatever it be, it is the gift of God, and belongs to him; and is ever under a perpetual neceſſity of being directed and applied by his light and grace for the diſcerning the truth. It is often in need of being improved and enlarged on many occaſions; and otherwiſe all human light will prove a principle of error, and by avoiding one inconvenience, will lead into another. We are therefore all in a total

dependence on God; our confidence muſt be in the conduct of his wiſdom and not our own, without this we cannot poſſibly avoid going out of the way: Wherefore, inſtead of eſteeming ourſelves wiſe, we are rather to conſider ourſelves as blind, and as having no other means of going right, but by demanding and following the direction of God. Hence all thoſe ought to be very jealous of themſelves, who, on the confidence of their abilities and knowledge, undertaking to be their own expoſitors in myſteries of faith, and their own directors in the difficulties of conſcience, withdraw themſelves from that authority and help, which God has appointed to ſecure them againſt all the miſtakes of their own thoughts. For it being the effect of God's goodneſs, who knows the weakneſs of man, to appoint him guides for his direction; it can be only the effect of man's weakneſs, either to diſtruſt or think ſuch guides unneceſſary, upon the confidence of his own light. This weakneſs in ſome is obſtinacy, in others paſſion and diſcontent, in others immoderate fears and ſcrupuloſity, in others a reſerved temper: But what ever it be, it is always unhappy, depriving a chriſtian of that better light, which Heaven has ordained for him; it is always the

fruit of open or ſome hidden pride, which puts him upon dangerous by-ways, when there is a plain road before him. For when God has commanded us to captivate our will, in obedience to his law, by ſelf-denials, and our underſtanding to his truths by faith; this ſhews our weakneſs, and that to be a true chriſtian one muſt be truly humble; and there can be no ſafer way, than to follow the ſame method in all the difficulties of human life; it being moſt ſuitable to the divine Providence, and moſt comfortable to us in all our infirmities and darkneſs; and nothing can ſo eaſily draw upon us the effects of our own folly and indiſcretion, as to be wiſe in our own conceits.

The ſecond is a duty of charity, *Not to return evil for evil*: And whoever obſerves it not, does himſelf a much greater injury, than what he reſents as done him by his neighbour. The evil received can be only ſome temporal inconvenience; but evil returned, is the evil of ſin, which to a true chriſtian is the only evil he knows: And therefore it muſt be ever unreaſonable for him to bring this miſchief on himſelf. This duty the Apoſtle repeats again in other terms, forbidding chriſtians to revenge their own cauſe; and he gives the reaſon;

Becauſe God has reſerved all vengeance to himſelf: He then that receives an injury with patience, puts his cauſe in God's hands, and certainly gains him on his ſide: But he that undertakes to revenge his own quarrel, is an unjuſt uſurper of a power that belongs not to him, and in this makes God his enemy, ſo that inſtead of one he complained of, by his own ill management he has now two.

Wherefore the Apoſtle preſſes the ſame in a third duty, requiring chriſtians to preſerve peace, as far as in them lies, with all. Here is a condition put; becauſe there are ſome ſo perverſe as to hate juſtice and truth, and will take offence from thoſe who eſpouſe their cauſe; which however is not to be abandoned on the apprehenſion of their diſpleaſure: In this caſe peace is often broken, and good chriſtians are engaged in it, though not in the guilt; ſince, bating the exceſſes of indiſcreet zeal; there can be no tranſgreſſion in being advocates for juſtice or truth. But then care is to be uſed not to cover all the effects of unreaſonable paſſion with this plea; for ſince none quarrel, but with the preſumption of juſtice on their ſide, they may hence think to juſtify all their heats: But St. *Paul* removes the ground of this pretext, by in-

forming us that peaceable methods are the moſt effectual for defending the cauſe of virtue, and that there is no need of breaking charity to maintain truth. All men cannot be of the ſame judgment at all times; temper and conſtitution lay the ground of difference; education, cuſtom, intereſt, favour, or ſelf-love put a great bias on the inclination; and this on the apprehenſion and reaſon; hence *right* and *truth* being very differently conceived, their cauſe is eſpouſed by all parties, and all go different ways: And ſince whatever favours one ſide is prejudicial to the other, hence diſlikes creep in, theſe grow up to animoſities, the parties begin to regard one another as adverſaries, and then the paſſions being excited, theſe draw in the reaſon to their ſupport, all is filled with quarrels and heats, and chriſtian peace is at length quite broken.

Wherefore St. *Paul* ſuppoſing it will be the caſe of every chriſtian to come into theſe circumſtances, does not allow him to meet heat with heat, or encounter paſſion with paſſion; but rather requires him to yield, if the controverſy be of things indifferent; and if it be a *right* that is to be aſſerted, to do it with the arms of the goſpel, with humility, patience and ſweet-

neſs: This being the only way allowed to private perſons of gaining victory, and triumphing over adverſaries. In this poſture they are beſt able to manifeſt the right they have, ſince being free from paſſion, they are more compoſed, and have a great advantage in the liberty of their own thoughts; they are out of danger of exaſperating their enemy by fierce and provoking replies, and may likely calm and ſweeten him by their moderation and temper; for though violent oppoſition ſeldom makes men juſt and reaſonable; yet mildneſs often does it: And if they prevail not, they have, at leaſt, the ſatisfaction of the humility and patience they have practiſed, which may balance, if not wholly take off the trouble of the injury received: For it is no ſmall comfort, to enjoy an undiſturbed peace and tranquility of mind, without which they cannot poſſeſs God or their own ſouls. Chriſtian prudence therefore without any other motives, is enough to oblige us to proceed with patience under all provocations, and to convince us, that choler, oppoſition and revenge, are treacherous ſuccours, which inſtead of relieving, always help to increaſe our evils.

And now having theſe preſcriptions of moderation and peace left us in holy writ; nay, it being there commanded us, to re-

turn good for evil, to feed, cloath, and aſſiſt our greateſt enemies, and thus overcome evil with good; is it not very ſtrange to ſee ſo very little of this practiſed, but that contentions, anger, impatience and revenge are the common methods of the profeſſors of chriſtianity; that every little trifle puts them upon theſe, whereas it is their duty to bear all extremities, without the breach of charity or peace? May we not therefore juſtly fear good chriſtians to be very few, ſince without conſidering the manifold tranſgreſſions againſt other precepts, the offences againſt this one duty, exclude ſuch vaſt numbers from all ſolid right to this title of being the children of God, and true followers of their maſter? Remedy this evil, we beſeech thee, O God; and ſince thou haſt appointed charity to be the character of thy diſciples, grant that all, who make profeſſion of being ſo, may fully practiſe what thou haſt commanded, and in this diſtinguiſh themſelves from all others.

Third Sunday after EPIPHANY.

GOSPEL.

Matt. viii. 1. ends verſe 13.

LORD, my ſervant lies ſick of a palſy in my houſe, and is very much tormented. They are the words of the centurion, making his petition to Chriſt in behalf of his ſick ſervant. His great ſolicitude for him, is firſt, an inſtruction to all heads of families, of the care they ought to have of their ſervants, in time of ſickneſs; not then to turn them out of doors, when they ſtand moſt in need of help; but to conſider them a part of their family, nay, even as their children; for ſo the centurion does, who in his addreſs to Chriſt, calls his ſervant his child, *Puer meus jacet in domo paralyticus;* and to give them that aſſiſtance, as is in charity due upon theſe titles: though there ſeems ſomething of equity too; for if ſervants give their health to their maſters, does not juſtice require ſome care to be taken of them when they are ſick, for

recovering that which is loſt in their ſervice? If chriſtian juſtice or charity teaches it not, at leaſt compaſſion ought; for otherwiſe that will be denied to ſervants, which is a common privilege of horſes and dogs.

This duty preſſes with greater force in regard of their ſouls; ſo that if ſervants are either careleſs in their chriſtian duties, or ſubject to any kind of ſinful diſorder, by which they offend God, and give ill example to their neighbour: Thoſe, in whoſe care they are, muſt uſe all poſſible endeavours, in order to reclaim and bring them to a better diſpoſition of ſpiritual health: Becauſe they have the charge of them, and are bound to conſider all their ways; and St. *Paul* lets them know in plain terms, what their charge is, 1 *Tim.* 5. 8. *He that has not a care of thoſe that belong to him, and principally thoſe of his family, has denied his faith, and is worſe than a heathen.* From which principle we may make ſome judgment of the heads of families, and ſee the different degrees in which they tranſgreſs their duty.

The firſt is of thoſe, who wholly neglect their ſervants, ſo that, though they ſee them ſubject to great diſorders and prophaneneſs, paſs all by without any concern, as if they were no part of their care.

The

The ſecond is of thoſe who obſerve little or no diſcipline in their families, but for want of good order, give their ſervants frequent opportunities of taking their own ways, both in idle converſation and ill company, and thus leaving them too often to the conduct of their own indiſcretion, become the occaſion of their ruin, both as to body and ſoul. How often is it, that hence good parents having placed their children out for learning a trade, find them, after a few months or years, corrupted beyond recovery? And upon whom muſt this miſcarriage be charged? The ſervants are not to be excuſed, becauſe they ought to be more careful of themſelves: But it will certainly fall with a heavy weight on the maſters; who, knowing the hazards of their unexperienced years, took not due care to prevent them, by obliging them to be ſubject to better order, than that of governing themſelves. Whence maſters may obſerve, that, to ſatisfy their duty, they muſt not only ſee that ſervants be diligent in their hours of buſineſs, but how they ſpend leiſure time, what company and hours they keep, what are their expences, how they employ *Sundays* and *holidays*, with many other particulars which are neceſſary for preventing the many miſchiefs, to which they are otherwiſe expoſed.

The third is of thoſe who are not ſolicitous that their ſervants be duly inſtructed, or that they be exact in their duties of prayer, reading, and going to the ſacraments. Thoſe who obſerve how great ignorance there is in this rank of Chriſtians; how many are the miſchiefs of their ignorance and ſloth; how eaſily they find pretexts for excuſing them in all that regards their ſoul, will ſoon diſcover what the obligation is of thoſe under whoſe care they are; and that, if theſe are not watchful in enquiring into their ways, charitable in admoniſhing, and earneſt in ſpurring them on, they muſt neceſſarily draw upon their own ſouls the guilt of their ſervants neglects.

The fourth is of thoſe, whoſe worldly and ſolicitous ſpirit will not allow their ſervants to ſpare time for their prayers, or other like duties; but think all that time loſt, which is not ſpent in their buſineſs.

The laſt is of thoſe, whoſe difficult temper, not capable of being pleaſed, is following ſervants ſo cloſely with expoſtulations and reproofs, that they keep them always uneaſy, and never permit their minds to calm ſo much, as to be capable of enjoying any inward peace, or performing any duty towards God. Not that ſeaſonable and deſerved reproof is to be condemned; but that ſome

conſideration is to be had of ſervants; ſo that while diligence is expected from them, they be not however perſecuted upon every trifling exception, ſuggeſted by a reſtleſs and peeviſh humour; for that this robs them of all comfort, and indiſpoſes them for thoſe duties, which cannot be ſatisfied amidſt ſuch confuſion.

In theſe particular ways, beſides that of ill example, and others, many are wanting in that duty, which belongs to ſuch as are under their charge, and may find at the laſt day, a large account brought in againſt them, from the pernicious conſequences of this neglect. But now, while charity and juſtice oblige maſters to a great care in regard to their ſervants; the ſame virtues bring a great obligation likewiſe upon ſervants, as to the care they ought to have of their maſters.

Firſt, In the point of reſpect, in putting a reſtraint upon their words, ſo as, whether in the caſe of juſt or unjuſt reproof, to ſay nothing unbecoming their condition; nor, upon any provocation, to let paſſion put them upon diſreſpectful expreſſions. By moderate anſwers they muſt endeavour to remove miſtakes; and where theſe are not admitted, they muſt leave the reſt to time and providence to do them right. This ſame reſtraint

muſt tie their lips alſo behind their maſters backs, ſo as to ſuppreſs all manner of undecent complaints and murmurings, ſuch, eſpecially, as are leſſening to thoſe whom they ſerve: And this ſilence ought to be more ſtrictly obſerved, in never publiſhing to ſtrangers the ſecrets of the families in which they are; for this is a kind of treachery: And if their maſters come to ſuffer in reputation, by their goſſiping, indiſcretion, or malice, they muſt anſwer it both to God and man.

Secondly, In the point of fidelity, ſo as not to let their maſters ſuffer any prejudice in their goods, by their neglect, or prodigality, or for making any advantage to themſelves. Hence juſtice obliges them to be as careful of whatever is under their charge, as if it were their own; and likewiſe to make ſatisfaction for whatever loſs happens to their maſter, through their ſloth, or affected careleſsneſs. It obliges them likewiſe to manage all with their greateſt induſtry for his advantage, and to diſpoſe of nothing that is his, but by his order or permiſſion. And therefore, as to all, they otherwiſe give away, or ſpend in treating companions or friends, it muſt be conſidered as nothing leſs than theft, and it is their duty to ſatisfy for what they have thus miſ-ſpent. It obliges them again to avoid all manner of contracts, in which their

intereſt is advanced by their maſter's loſs: There are variety of theſe among ſuch as have the managing or paying of money, and practice pleads ſtrongly for them; but ſince they generally intrench upon juſtice, theſe cannot be allowed in any, who think of being called to an account for all they do.

Thirdly, In the point of diligence, ſo that they faithfully perform whatever ſervice they undertake; not only when they have the maſter's eye to overlook them, but even when they are without a witneſs, and preſume upon never being queſtioned for what they do. This it is they undertake, and they are as much obliged to ſatisfy it, as if every particular were expreſſed in a formal contract. The obligation therefore is of ſtrict juſtice, and it ought to preſs with ſo much weight upon the conſcience of every one in ſervice, that I cannot but fear, thoſe who are wanting in it, either through ſloth, or by imperfect endeavours of pleaſing the eye, are wanting in the moſt ſubſtantial principles of juſtice and faith, and cannot be good Chriſtians, if they are not diligent ſervants.

Theſe are the principal points, which ought to be the concern both of maſters and ſervants; and neither can have true peace of conſcience, but by examining themſelves on theſe particulars, and being careful in the exact

diſcharge of them; becauſe that juſtice we owe to God and our neighbour, obliges all the profeſſors of Chriſtianity, not only to ſatisfy their general duties, which are common to all, but thoſe likewiſe which belong to every particular ſtate; for thus we are taught both by nature and reaſon, both by ſcripture and faith. Since therefore thou art pleaſed, O God, by thy Goſpel, thus to put us in mind of our duties, give us grace likewiſe, that we may be faithful in them; we are too eaſy in deceiving ourſelves, in doing our duty by halves; teach us to be more ſincere, and deliver us from all deluſion, that having received our charge from thee, we may be prepared to render a juſt account.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

EPISTLE.

Rom. xiii. 8. Ends verſe 10.

HE *that loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.* Eternal happineſs depending on the fulfilling the law of God, it is no ſmall comfort to find the whole extent of a Chriſtian's duty abridged into the narrow compaſs of one ſingle point, by which every one is made capable, without diſtraction or confuſion, of examining into the ſtate of his ſoul, and diſcovering how fair he ſtands for the obtaining that inheritance to which he pretends. And as for the negative part, there needs no examining at all; for if *loving our neighbour* be fulfilling the law, it is demonſtration, that whoever is out of charity with any neighbour, fulfils it not, and conſequently living in diſobedience to God, muſt look on his title to that inheritance to be very weak, if not wholly void, which is promiſed and ſettled, not on rebels, but on faithful and obedient children. For heaven is not to be ob-

tained, but on thoſe very terms and conditions which he has appointed, who is ſole proprietor and maſter of it: And ſince this here mentioned, is what he indiſpenſibly requires, a breach of it muſt be a forfeiture of all right and claim.

But now to give a like ſatisfaction to the affirmative part, is more difficult; for though it be indiſputable, that whoever loves his neighbour, fulfils the law; yet it is not ſo very eaſy to determine who it is that loves his neighbour, as here required; it being a matter ſubject to variety of miſtakes. And, firſt, it is evident, *common civility* is not the practice of this love, nor a ſufficient proof of a heart being poſſeſſed with it; for this is too often grounded on reſpects purely human; as in perſons of quality, who are exact in all its niceties, to ſhew their education and politeneſs; others of lower rank are induſtrious in all its points, to gain ſomething of a like eſteem, and add to their reputation. And in all conditions, great numbers have no other motive of being civil to all, than the fear of that prejudice, which otherwiſe they may bring upon themſelves, by being wanting in this part of breeding, in being deſpiſed, ridiculed, and ſlighted. Vanity is another root of civility in too many, who are pleaſed in the numbers of their viſits, and therefore are

civil to all, that in all accidents of misfortune or ſucceſs, they may be followed with crowds to condole or congratulate with them: It is the ſame in others, who by this means have the more frequent opportunity of going to ſuch acquaintance, where they hope to meet company, who may admire their riches, beauty, or quaintneſs of addreſs. Idleneſs and cuſtom is another motive of civility; many have nothing to do, and therefore by this way draw company to paſs their life away with leſs uneaſineſs to themſelves; and others practiſe the ſame, without any other reaſon but becauſe it is the faſhion. Now in all theſe, who are thus obliging and civil, and have the repute of the world, it is plain, it is not the love of their neighbour, but ſelf-love that moves them, ſince in all they do, they only ſeek themſelves, which cannot poſſibly be that branch of charity, here deſcribed to be the fulneſs of the law.

Secondly, It is evident, that *affability*, *ſweetneſs*, or *common friendſhip*, is not *this love of our neighbour*; becauſe the two former have many times no better foundation than thoſe above, *vanity*, *intereſt*, or *ſelf-love*; and therefore, however they may render men compleat and acceptable, yet they cannot make them virtuous. It is generally the ſame as to *ordinary friendſhip*; for though there may be

ſuch a thing as holy friendſhip, which S. *Francis Sales* commends; yet ordinary friendſhips are nothing but an honourable ſort of traffic, by which men deſign to make ſome advantage anſwerable to their different pretenſions or paſſions: So that if it be not ſome intereſt that promotes it, it is many times a ſenſual affection, which uſhers in, under a pretended innocence, ſuch miſchiefs, that, inſtead of fulfilling the law, it always weakens, and often ends in the open violation of it.

The love of our neighbour then, that is, the fulfilling of the law, is nothing of all theſe; but it is a branch or extenſion of the love of God, by which a Chriſtian deſires for his neighbour the ſovereign good, deſires God to his neighbour, and his neighbour to God. This love begins in God, and from him flows upon all that bear his image, that are created by him, for the enjoyment of eternal happineſs, and are redeemed by him, for obtaining that poſſeſſion of bliſs. This love is the accompliſhment of the law; for though it requires not any expreſs reflection of thought, or ſenſible affection, by which the heart is carried with inclination towards every one; yet it abſolutely requires a certain motion of the will, by which it is inclined to deſire and procure the good of every neighbour, and is averſe from every thing

that may do him harm: And thus it fulfils the law; for he that thus truly loves his neighbour, cannot injure him, neither in his goods, nor in his reputation, nor in his life, nor do him any ſort of injuſtice. Hence it is plain, the love St. *Paul* ſpeaks of, is not a barren and unactive love; but ſuch as is ever in readineſs to follow the commands of God; ſuch as puts a reſtraint on the will, in regard of whatever is forbidden; and puſhes it forward, to diſcharge all the duties of juſtice and charity.

It is a love always inclining to give relief to every neighbour, conſidering the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt in every one that is in diſtreſs, and that whatever is done to them, is done to him. And though this love has bounds as to its outward effects, ſince one charity may be inconſiſtent with another, and obligation to family or children, and oftentimes ſickneſs or inability may either greatly limit, or render them wholly impracticable; yet it is always careful that neither luxury, nor ambition, nor vanity, nor covetouſneſs, nor a diſtruſt of providence, ſets bounds to the exerciſe of its charity, either by diſabling or ſhutting its hands. But as to the interior effects, which are never inconſiſtent, it is ever diligent in the practice of them, having always ſincere deſires of aſſiſting thoſe, whom otherwiſe it

cannot help: And therefore it continually prays for every neighbour, ſuffers and bears with them: And theſe, no queſtion, are great alms in the ſight of God, and ſuch as will have the reward of all thoſe actions, which their circumſtances made them uncapable of performing.

Thirdly, It is a love, which produces a patience without bounds, and ſuch as is invincible under the greateſt provocations; forgiving injuries, not only ſeven times, but ſeventy times ſeven. For there being none ſo great, which any neighbour can do us, but what is capable of the divine mercy; therefore the Chriſtian that has charity, prays that every ſuch neighbour may find this mercy: And conſequently can never diſpenſe with himſelf in not forgiving him; ſince it is impoſſible he ſhould heartily pray that God would pardon him, and he, on his part, refuſe the pardon which he aſks for him of God. And though he may be diſcouraged with the apprehenſion of his neighbour being profligately wicked, yet ſince, whatever his wickedneſs be, he is certainly miſerable too, it is with this conſideration God will have him look on every neighbour, ſo to excite his compaſſion towards him: There being no ſufficient motive to conclude any irrecover-

ably wicked, till an impenitent death has rendered all amendment impoſſible.

This is the love, and theſe the conditions of it, which fulfils the law: Grant then, O God of infinite goodneſs and love, that, in ſeeking this rich jewel, we may not be deceived with counterfeit and falſe pretences; that we may never believe we have it, till we are convinced by its effects, in being deſirous and ready to aſſiſt, ſuffer, and pray for every neighbour: Till we find, that no injuries are able to ſhut our hands or hearts againſt him: This is the charity, bleſſed Redeemer, of which thou haſt given us example, and it is in this alone we can be ſecure.

Fourth Sunday after EPIPHANY.

GOSPEL.

Matt. viii. 23. Ends verſe 27.

LORD, *ſave us, we periſh.* In theſe words the apoſtles addreſſed themſelves to Chriſt in their diſtreſs, when, he ſleeping in the ſhip, they were in danger, by the violence of a ſudden ſtorm. This danger of the Apoſtles affords matter of comfort to Chriſtians, in the troubles that befal them in this life. For if theſe, having Chriſt in their company, and undertaking to paſs over the ſea, with his conſent, and even by his order, as muſt be here preſumed, find themſelves ſurpriſed in a tempeſt, ſuch as threatens them with ſhipwreck; does not this prepare Chriſtians againſt all ſurpriſe, if in ſatisfying their beſt duties, and turning their labours, where the manifeſt will of God ſeems to lead them, they yet meet with difficulties, and find ſuch perſecution raiſed againſt them, as not only to threaten a miſcarriage, but likewiſe to put them upon queſtioning the juſtice of their undertaking?

This then is the inſtruction of the preſent ſtorm: Chriſtians, like the apoſtles, are to engage in nothing, but by the orders of Chriſt; that is, are ever to be under the conduct of juſtice and duty. Being thus embarked, they are not to think themſelves privileged from tempeſts and danger, but hoping and praying for a proſperous gale, they are to be ſtill prepared for ſtorms; becauſe they ſee what the method of Providence is; that God does not raiſe the fury of the waves againſt a *Jonas* only, who ſails contrary to his orders, but likewiſe, when Jeſus is in the ſhip, the apoſtles at the helm, and they ſteering by his commiſſion. This has been ſo frequently the conduct of God, that all ſurpriſe here muſt be charged upon want of obſervation. Was not *Abraham* called by God himſelf out of his country, and the land pointed out to him by the finger of God, into which he was to go? When behold a famine meets him, he cannot ſubſiſt where Providence has directed; but he is obliged to ſeek relief by a new pilgrimage. *Moſes* is by name ſummoned from heaven, to go and deliver the *Iſraelites* from their captivity; he undertakes it in the very way appointed him by God; and what is the immediate effect? The people he attempted to relieve, are oppreſſed with greater burthens, the court of *Pharaoh* is exaſperated by his

embaſſy, and the *Iſraelites* reproach him for having put a ſword into their enemies hand to kill them. The children of *Iſrael* make a juſt war upon *Benjamin*, [*Judges*, ch. 20.] they aſſemble before the houſe of God, have a General of God's appointment, and his expreſs orders for engaging in battle; twice they conſult him, and by him are encouraged to fight, and yet are twice overthrown with a great ſlaughter. And did not the apoſtles afterwards, in the new law, undertake the preaching of the goſpel by the poſitive commands of Chriſt; and how many perſecutions were raiſed againſt them? What a univerſal oppoſition did they find? And did not the world ſeem to triumph over them, whilſt they all fell in the attempt, and were made a ſacrifice to malice and error?

If this then be the conduct of God, what muſt Chriſtians do? Muſt not they go on ever reſolutely in their duty, and not be diſcouraged with whatever difficulties thwart them in their way? If in ſatisfying the obligations of juſtice, if in doing charities, if in following Chriſt, and being faithful to truth, they not only meet with oppoſition, but often find themſelves drawn into moſt perplexing circuſtances, are not they quietly to ſubmit to theſe appointments of Providence, and be contented, if God calls them to exerciſe their

patience with their other pious deſigns? What this, is but to raiſe the value of what they do, and by interrupting the peace of their undertakings, to defer their ſatisfactions to a better world? What is it, but to recal them to the knowledge of themſelves, to make them more ſenſible of human weakneſs, and oblige them to a greater dependence on God? Should theſe contradictions then cauſe dejection in Chriſtians, and caſt a damp on their ſpirits, as if they carried with them the diſpleaſure of God, and were arguments of his diſapproving their undertakings? This cannot be altogether prevented, it may be, in their firſt ſurpriſe; and melancholy, improved by a ſubtle enemy, may be too forward in increaſing the confuſion; but it muſt be their endeavour to withſtand this impoſture, by compoſing their diſordered thoughts, and peaceably leaving God to the ſecrets of his own conduct; remembering, that as it was his will, they ſhould undertake what charity or juſtice inſpired; ſo it is his will, they ſhould ſuffer the diſappointments of their deſigns, and ſubmit to the troubles that are the conſequence of their attempts: And ſuch ſuffering may be much more to their advantage, than if peace, applauſe and ſucceſs, had anſwered their wiſhes.

It is under ſuch troubles, they may make their petitions to God with greater confidence than at other times; ſince God's infinite mercy cannot be wanting in their relief, whoſe troubles are not the effects of their raſhneſs or vice, but of their duty; in ſuch diſtreſs the apoſtles invoked their maſter's help, and ſoon found it in an unexpected calm, which quieted both the ſea and their fears. And while Chriſtians ſee, that the ſea and winds obey his voice, and in this confeſs all creatures to be ſubject to his power, have not they reaſon to raiſe their hopes in proportion to this power, eſpecially where his goodneſs too is engaged by their ſuffering in his cauſe, and ſo with confidence expect, that he will appear in their behalf, either to command a calm, or give them ſtrength to hold out with a courageous patience, amidſt the dangers of the ſtorm?

The prayer the apoſtles uſed, muſt be very effectual for this: *Lord, ſave us, we periſh*; ſince nothing can better expreſs our own miſery, and the abſolute dependence we have on God, two neceſſary conditions for obtaining help: And what better encouragement, than in the ſpeedy relief it brought to the apoſtles in their diſtreſs? I wiſh only it were more frequent amongſt Chriſtians, and that, then eſpecially when they are not capable of

longer prayer, they would not omit this. They eaſily ſee here the ſucceſs of a few words, when coming from a ſincere heart, and ſenſible of its wants; and this ſucceſs is a ſufficient condemnation of their practice, who, upon every ſurpriſe, pronounce this ſacred name of *Lord*, with many others, with their lips, but without any ſenſe of what they ſay; that is, who take the name of God in vain. For is it not in vain, when it is without reſpect and thought? Is it not in vain, when it comes from no farther than their lips? Is it not in vain, when that, which is ſo uſeful, and might be ſo much to their advantage, in drawing down the bleſſings of heaven, they ſpeak to no purpoſe, and for no uſe at all, but only as a by-word; that is, the moſt inſignificant of all? They are forward enough in crying out againſt *waſte* and *abuſe*, when that, which might be ſerviceable to themſelves or family, is by neglect rendered uſeleſs, or careleſsly thrown away: Here ſervants muſt be condemned, and their reproof is deſerved. What then muſt it be, in the frequent abuſe of the ſacred names of God and our Redeemer? Is there no better uſe of theſe, than in making uſeleſs exclamations, and letting them be the burthen of every ridiculous ſurpriſe and outcry? This however is no matter of wonder in thoſe, whoſe diſordered lives ſpeak too

plainly their contempt of all that is holy: But that this ſhould be the practice of ſuch, whoſe better principles put them upon taking pains for heaven, is ſo great an abſurdity, that it muſt be ſet down as juſt matter of ſurpriſe, that profeſſed piety ſhould tolerate a cuſtom ſo diſreſpectful of God, and of ſuch ill example to men. Whilſt therefore thou art pleaſed, O God, to offer thyſelf for the protector of Chriſtians, and thy mercy is ever ready to appear in their relief, who, ſenſible of their miſery, invoke thy holy name in time of their diſtreſs, teach all in trouble to ſeek help in thee, and let thy goodneſs ever anſwer their wants, for the encouragement of their piety: But, O God, as for thoſe who abuſe thy name, in prophaning and making that common, which ought to be moſt ſacred, give them a ſenſe of this irreverence, that while they every day pray that thy name may be ſanctified, they may not, with th e ſame lips, bring it into contempt.

Fifth Sunday after EPIPHANY.

EPISTLE.

Coloſ. iii. 12. Ends verſe 17.

LET *the peace of Chriſt rule in your hearts.* The peace of Chriſt is that which the world cannot give. There may be great ſatisfaction in the goods and enjoyments of this life, in a plentiful eſtate, in children, in friends, in honours, in reputation, &c. but nothing of this is the peace of Chriſt; for all theſe are common to the heathen and unbeliever, as well as the Chriſtian: And if the Chriſtian finds peace in them, it is the peace only of the natural man, and not of the ſpiritual; it is a peace which recommends the world to him, and him to the world; but is no argument of his being a member of Chriſt, or at peace with God; it is a peace which the world gives, and the world can take away; ſince upon every fright or change that happens, it is wholly loſt, and, like the houſe built upon the ſand, is overthrown by a ſtorm; and in this plainly ſhews, on what foundation

it ſtood; not on Chriſt, but the world: And therefore, however deſirable it may be to ſenſe and nature, which even ſeek ſuch deceitful goods; yet there is no ſuch real advantage in it, that he is ever the better Chriſtian that has it, or the worſe that has it not. It is true, if we regard the common judgments of men, they have no other rule in pronouncing a man happy, but in proportion to theſe worldly enjoyments which he poſſeſſes: And ſo of courſe, they conclude him miſerable, who has them not. Thus the world judges; but as this deceives others, ſo likewiſe it is deceived itſelf: The goſpel declares its error, and the good Chriſtian finds the ſenſible experience of it; who, ſeeking heaven, feels a diſtraction in all that is worldly; and that if he cannot, in ſpirit, ſeparate himſelf from what he poſſeſſes of it, he becomes miſerable in the very enjoyment of that for which he is reputed happy: So that all of this kind is ſo far from bringing him true peace, that it becomes a danger to him of deſtroying all inward quiet. He knows what powerful charms theſe are to corrupt nature, and if they prevail ſo far as to gain poſſeſſion of his heart, the love of theſe diminiſhes the love of God; their dazzling light darkens the light of heaven: And though ſome ſuperficial comforts attend this

ſtate; yet whenever he reflects with any ſerious thought upon himſelf, he then diſcovers a real miſery within; he laments his great diſorder, loſes all peace; and nothing but *not thinking* can moderate his ſighs and tears: And if he ever reſolves to recover his internal quiet; he knows there is no other expedient but what the goſpel preſcribes, by really, or elſe in ſpirit, renouncing whatever he enjoys: And thus, in the midſt of worldly bleſſings, courted and admired by all, he heartily envies their better ſtate, who, living obſcured and hid from the world, enjoy what is ſufficient to ſupport nature, but have not enough to diſquiet or draw their hearts from God.

The peace then of Chriſt is not the effect of this kind of bleſſings, but conſiſts in a well-ordered conſcience, ſatisfied in all the accompliſhments of God's will, and rejoicing in the hope of bliſs. This is the peace the apoſtle deſires ſhould reign in every Chriſtian's heart. He would not have it be only there in thought, or in an unſettled way, as the effect of ſome holy, but paſſing glance; what he requires, is, that it ſhould be fixed, and like an abſolute ſovereign, command and over-rule all other affections and paſſions of the mind, whatever may appear, and ſeditiouſly ſtrive to gain poſſeſſion of that poſt.

He would have it ſo powerful, as to maintain its right and ground in all diſappointments; troubles, loſſes, afflictions in life, and death. For in all theſe the will of God appearing, however diſagreeable they may otherwiſe be, yet ſtill that peace, which is built on the fulfilling God's will, is to ſtand its ground. For, if a Chriſtian that daily prays, *Thy will be done*, only then finds peace within, when every thing proſpers, and goes on ſmoothly according to his wiſh; and upon every trouble, yields under the diſorder of an unquiet mind; it is plain his peace was only the effect of his own will being done, and not of God's. For ſince the will of God is equal in all that happens of this kind, though all cannot be alike to nature, yet it is the Chriſtian's taſk to embrace all that comes, and ſtill preſerve his peace: For ſince by faith he diſcerns theſe truths, that God ordains and governs all; that nothing happens without his Providence; that in whatever comes to paſs in the world, he either exerciſes his juſtice or his mercy; that no creature has any power but what he gives; that all are either the inſtruments or miniſters of his decrees: in this he diſcovers ſufficient reaſons to lay the foundations of a laſting peace. For he always finds it reaſonable and beſt, that God ſhould govern, and he obey; that God ſhould guide,

guide, and he follow; that he ſhould conform himſelf to God's will, and not deſire that God ſhould ſubmit to his; for that God's will being always juſt, always holy; it is likewiſe always adorable, always worthy of his ſubmiſſion and love, though in its effects it ſometimes proves uneaſy and troubleſome; and therefore he cannot diſapprove or find fault with it without being unjuſt, becauſe it is all what juſtice itſelf does. Thus ever diſcerning the will of God in all that happens, the ſight of his juſtice and majeſty, checks all his complaints and impatience, and never permits him to go farther, in the moſt afflicting difficulties, than with *David*, to cry out, *I held my peace and was humbled, becauſe it was thou, O Lord, didſt it.*

And it is not to be wondered he finds peace in the evils of this life, and the contradictions of men, ſince he preſerves the ſame even in his ſpiritual infirmities, in his failings and faults, and in the contradiction and war of his own paſſions and thoughts. He labours, by a watchful diligence, to remedy all his wilful faults as well as he can, and humbles himſelf under all ſuch as are involuntary; he ſuffers whatever he cannot tell how to remedy; and ſince it is God's will he ſhould be in the world in this manner, and with theſe conditions, he quietly ſubmits,

waiting on the goodneſs of God for his perfect cure, when he ſhall pleaſe to grant it. Thus the peace of Chriſt always rules in his heart, and is ever victorious over all trouble; nothing appearing more certain to him, than to conclude, whenever he is ſenſible of trouble, that it is God's will, he ſhould defend himſelf from it, as being nothing but a temptation, which hinders the ſoul from acting, brings diſcouragements and a kind of ſloth ever with it, and prevents the well-doing all duties that then belong to him; and no pretexts are to be admitted for yielding under it: For trouble, anxiety, and dejection, are always evil, and it is a moſt preſſing obligation, at all times, to ſtand againſt them. So that I here moſt earneſtly recommend it to all, not only in regard of thoſe diſquiets occaſioned by ſome affliction; but likewiſe of thoſe many oppreſſions and dejections which are the effect of conſtitution, and are rather an indiſpoſition, or diſtemper, than the conſequence of any real evil: For theſe being as pernicious to all Chriſtian duties as the former, muſt with an equal care be reſiſted, whilſt they deſtroy all inward peace, which we are bound at all times to preſerve. It is even in theſe too a Chriſtian ought to conſider the will of God, and look on them as exerciſes he is pleaſed to ſend him, for the

trial of his ſubmiſſion and patience: And he that accuſtoms himſelf to reſt and be ſatisfied in the fulfilling God's moſt holy will, by degrees will find reſt in theſe too, and be in a way of diminiſhing, if not wholly removing them; ſince a ſubmiſſion to God has ever the bleſſing of an interior comfort attending it, and thus the peace of Chriſt will be preſerved. Inſtruct all thy faithful, O bleſſed Redeemer, in this leſſon: Divert them by thy grace from ſeeking the peace of this world, and direct them to a better, ſuch a peace, which they learn from thee in thy perfect ſubmiſſion to thy Father's will; a peace which may make them victorious over all troubles, and ſecure them againſt all ſnares: Teach them to embrace thy will in all things; this will give reſt to their ſouls, a reſt which will be conſummated at length in thee.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

GOSPEL.

Matthew xiii. 24. Ends verſe 30.

LET *both grow till the harveſt.* The huſbandman had ſowed good ſeed in his field; but growing up, it appeared mixed with tares: And the Goſpel ſays, theſe were ſown by the enemy whilſt they were ſleeping, whoſe watchfulneſs ſhould have prevented this miſchief. By which we are informed, that the general occaſion of all manner of diſorders, both public and private, is want of care by their ſleeping who ſhould be upon the watch. This is the root of ſo many ſcandals that diſfigure the church; they, who are entruſted with the charge, having their eyes ſhut by ſloth, or diverted from their duty by the charms of pleaſure, intereſt, or ambition, give opportunity to the devil of laying thoſe ſeeds, which, though at firſt undiſcerned, are not afterwards to be rooted out, but with the hazard of the good corn. This is the occaſion of ſo much vice amongſt the flock: A general careleſsneſs

opens a way to all manner of corruption; they conſider not their own weakneſs, are not ſenſible of his ſnares, who lies in wait to deceive; hence they take not pains to ſecure themſelves; they examine not into the nature of things, are not jealous of being deceived, ſolicit not for help in proportion to their wants. And what is the effect? The buſy enemy takes the advantage of this want of care; he ſows his tares, and behold how they grow up; profeſſed pride and ambition is their practice, who are taught humility by the Goſpel; they, who are commanded to be poor in ſpirit, ſpend their whole ſouls in the eager ſearch after riches; they, who are enjoined moderation in all things, live in the practice of a general intemperance and exceſs; ſelf-denial is required, and their whole buſineſs is to gratify themſelves; paſſion and revenge appear inſtead of charity and meekneſs; over-reaching and deceit, inſtead of juſtice and plain dealing; contention, inſtead of peace; hypocriſy and flattery, inſtead of ſingleneſs of heart; and earth ſought for, inſtead of the kingdom of God and its juſtice.

This is the face of things, and even of that part of the chriſtian world, whoſe Goſpel and faith is not to be queſtioned; ſo that, while truth is ſecured to the church by the promiſes of God, and the aſſiſtance of his unerring

Spirit, and abundant proviſion made for all kind of holineſs and grace; yet, notwithſtanding this good ſeed ſown by the maſter of the field, there is ſo much corruption, ſcandals, abuſes, prophaneneſs, and wickedneſs, among the members of it, that the tares every where appearing, the good corn is ſcarce to be diſcerned. Theſe tares are very remarkable to travellers, and theſe judging of the whole by what is ſo obvious to them, they often conclude there can be no ttuth where ſo many unwarrantable practices are tolerated. Theſe tares are manifeſt to ſeekers, and they are many times diſcouraged from all farther enquiry, by the ſcandalous vices of thoſe who are profeſſors of the truth. Nay, this is ſo great a ſtumbling-block to ſuch as are in a great meaſure convinced of the principles and means in the church for teaching the truth, that they are often at a ſtand for many years before they can get over it, and reconcile the corrupt abuſes of men, with the truth and the doctrine of the church. In this manner the irregularities of eccleſiaſtics, religious and laity, obſcure that light Chriſt has ſet up for leading the world into truth; and ſmother that evidence, which otherwiſe would be a force upon the moſt obſtinate.

This it was Chriſt foreſaw, and for the

help of ſincere enquirers he propoſes this parable, to remove this block out of their way; or, at leaſt, to help them over it. He ſhews, that though the church, which is the field of Chriſt, be holy; though there be good ſeed ſown in it; yet it is not to be expected that all ſhould be found holy who are within the incloſure: Tares are likewiſe ſown by the enemy through their neglect, who ought to be more watchful; theſe grow up in many evil practices, and are mixed with the good corn, and this is the poſture of Chriſt's church on earth. The ſame information he gives in other parables, as of the ten virgins, (the figure of his church) of which number, five were wiſe, and five were fooliſh: And in the parable of the flour, in which there was not only wheat, but likewiſe ſtraw and chaff. In this ſenſe the apoſtle ſays, in a great houſe there are not only veſſels of gold and ſilver, but alſo of wood and clay; ſome veſſels of honour, and ſome of diſhonour; and in the ſame ſenſe muſt be underſtood what Chriſt ſays, *That many are called, but few are choſen:* And theſe very parables St. *Cyprian* and St. *Auguſtin* make uſe of againſt the *Novatians* and *Donatiſts*, to prove the unreaſonableneſs of their ſeparating from the church, becauſe of the corrupt practices of her members; hence ſhewing,

that though there be tares in the church, yet it cannot be juſtifiable in any to ſeparate from the corn on account of the tares: And this muſt be a light to all thoſe who look for the truth, clear enough to inform them, that corruptions being found amongſt the members of the church is not enough to juſtify them in living ſeparate from it; and likewiſe to demonſtrate their injuſtice who condemn the church, becauſe of the tares found in it.

But why are not the tares rooted up, ſince they are ſo injurious to thoſe within, and ſo ſcandalous to thoſe without the church? There are not wanting pious ſouls, whoſe zeal, like the ſervants mentioned in the Goſple, puſhes them on, not only to deſire, but to undertake the work; and in all ages there have been apoſtolic men, who have made great reformations: But, however, ſome diſorders there are, ſo ſtrengthened by power, intereſt, or number, that to attempt to root them out would be followed with ſuch confuſions, that the ill conſequence of endeavouring their cure would be much greater than their ill example in being tolerated. Upon which conſideration, the maſter ſilenced the zeal of thoſe ſervants who made the motion of gathering up the tares, by telling them of the danger of rooting up the wheat with the tares, and upon this, requiring them

to *let both grow till the harveſt.* This is the anſwer *St Auguſtin* made to *Parmenion* the *Donatiſt: The conſideration,* ſays he, *of preſerving peace ſometimes keeps off the ſeverity of diſcipline, which, nevertheleſs, is put in execution when it can be done ſecurely; and there is evident reaſon to hope, that eccleſiaſtical cenſures may work a wholeſome correction, without the wound of ſchiſm.*

But, however, though the tares are thus ſpared, it is in favour of the corn, and only for a time: For at the harveſt, command will be given to gather the tares, and to caſt them into the fire; and this muſt be the unhappy fate of all thoſe, who, by their ſcandalous practices, are like tares in the church; they muſt be the fuel of everlaſting fire, in which they ſhall be tormented, but not conſumed. Unhappy tares, who, by their united intereſt and ſtrength, are beyond the power of being corrected by human means, and muſt be left to the juſtice of an Almighty hand, without the poſſibility of amendment or relief: But what is on earth impracticable in general, is in the power of every particular; though the whole cannot be reformed, yet every ſingle perſon of their number may receive the benefit of mercy here on earth, if they will but ſeek it in earneſt. This it is we beg of thee, O God, for ourſelves, as far as

we are concerned, and for all others, who by their wickedneſs are comprehended under this figure of the tares. Give to all a ſenſe of their diſorders, that they may underſtand how great an evil it is to forſake thy law, to be a diſhonour to thy church, and by their ſcandalous example to draw others into the way of damnation, and diſcourage thoſe who ſeek for truth: Grant them grace to amend, without waiting for company, and effectually to make uſe of thoſe means thou haſt ordained for their eſtabliſhment in virtue, that thus becoming good corn, they may not be found amongſt the tares, which are to be caſt into endleſs flames.

Sixth Sunday after EPIPHANY.

EPISTLE.

1 *Theſſ.* i. 2. Ends verſe 10.

WE *give thanks to God for you all without ceaſing, remembering you always in our prayers.* An excellent leſſon of gratitude and charity; evidently ſhewing what a deep impreſſion the bleſſings of God had made in the ſoul of this apoſtle, and how great a ſolicitude he had always for his flock. Two neceſſary duties for every paſtor: For if God gives a bleſſing to their labours in doing good to their flock, 'tis but juſt they ſhould with gratitude daily acknowledge whoſe bleſſings they are; and to omit this point, as it argues their being either forgetful or inſenſible of the mercy; ſo it may eaſily ſhut God's hand againſt them, and be the occaſion of withdrawing his aſſiſtance, without which they can never hope for the like ſucceſs. But giving thanks for what is paſt, is not ſufficient; for what can any bleſſings avail the flock, if there be not a continuance of them? They who acknowledge it an effect of the divine goodneſs, if by their means any be

reclaimed from the miſery of ignorance, error, or vice, know it muſt be the effect of the ſame heavenly bounty to ſecure thoſe ſame perſons againſt all danger of relapſing; and that conſidering human weakneſs, and the powerful enemies of this mortal ſtate, all promiſing beginnings and greateſt improvements will come to nothing, if the bleſſing of the ſame hand that begun does not perfect the work. Hence thoſe paſtors, who have ſeen any fruit of their labours, are ſolicitous with St. *Paul*, to beg God's mercy on all thoſe who have received benefit from their endeavours, daily remembering them in their prayers, and begging God to be their protection againſt the dangers of their own weakneſs, and the ſolicitations of all enemies. And truly, whoever conſiders the infinite miſcarriages of the flock, for want of this divine aſſiſtance, in the numbers of thoſe who, after zealous and fervent beginnings, have either returned to the vomit, or loſt all ſenſe of duty, by giving themſelves up to habitual ſloth or vice, will find ſufficient reaſon for the daily practice of this charitable devotion. And, no queſtion, it was the ſenſe of this danger and inconſtancy, inſeparable from this our ſtate of corruption, moved the apoſtle daily to perform this charity.

And may we not in this diſcover ſome grounds for believing the bleſſed in heaven to pray before the throne of God in behalf of all thoſe they have left behind in this vale of miſery? For ſince this is the effect of charity, and *charity*, as St. *Paul* ſays, *never ceaſes*; *nunquam excidit*; but is much more perfect in heaven than on earth; it muſt neceſſarily follow, that where it is more perfect it cannot be more barren and inactive, but muſt be practiſed in greater perfection. St. *Paul*, and all Chriſtians, whilſt as yet in this imperfect ſtate, knowing the great neceſſities and dangers of their fellow-members, cannot be ſuppoſed to have had charity if they put not up their prayers to their common Father for the obtaining for them this help: And can it be imagined this charity, when raiſed in heaven to a much higher degree, ſhould do leſs? Thoſe bleſſed ſouls now glorified are ſtill members of the myſtical body of Chriſt; they are enflamed with the love of God; this love is not more confined for being in heaven, and therefore extends itſelf, as before, to all their fellow-members. Fervent deſires of their eternal good are the neceſſary conſequence of this love; and effectual deſires cannot be ſeparated from contributing to it all they can: Being, therefore, in preſence of that inexhauſtible good-

neſs, by whoſe mercy they themſelves were conducted through all dangers, and effectually deſiring the ſame mercy for all that are ſtill in want; theſe deſires are accompanied with prayers for the filling up the number of the elect. Thus all good ſouls, whether in heaven or earth, being members of the ſame body, deſire the good of this body, and are united in prayers for the drawing down the bleſſings of its head on all that belong to it: And it is of theſe prayers all good Chriſtians deſire to partake; and deſiring it, they likewiſe pray for it; that ſo, what is wanting through their infirmities, they may hope to have ſupplied by this common charity.

The prayers then of others may be a help to Chriſtians for the application of Chriſt's merits to their ſouls; but it is only a help, and cannot alone ſuffice. There are other particulars which St. *Paul* commends in the *Theſſalonians*, and at the ſame time recommends them to our care and practice; as,

Firſt, The *works of faith;* that is, a faith active and lively, which manifeſts itſelf in the exact obſervance of all the commandments.

Secondly, A *firm hope*, which lets not go its hold of God under the ſevereſt trials: And

Thirdly, A *laborious charity*, which takes pains for obtaining the perfection neceſſary

for the ſecuring our future ſtate. It is in the conſtant practice of theſe virtues conſiſts a Chriſtian life; and conſequently, by theſe a Chriſtian ought to be diſtinguiſhed from all others. So that it is not enough for one that profeſſes this name to go on juſt in the ſame method, and doing the very ſame things, he would otherwiſe do, were he no Chriſtian at all; but he ought generally ſo to act, that what he does may be a proof of his ſoul being influenced by theſe divine virtues. For, as for the lawyer aſſiſting his clients, the phyſician making his viſits, the ſhop-keeper following his trade, ſervants working, parents providing for children and family, &c. all this is nothing but what they would faithfully do, were they only moral Heathens, and no Chriſtians. For though the careful performance of theſe common duties may be all Chriſtian actions, and very inſtrumental to the gaining eternal life, if done upon due motives, and referred to God; yet ſince they may be all performed too upon other principles, as of intereſt, cuſtom, or the inclinations of natural conſtitution, which ſtrongly move ſome to a great exactneſs in whatever they undertake; therefore there is a neceſſity of ſomething beyond this, to diſcover, with ſome aſſurance, whether a Chriſtian proceeds in what he does on thoſe better motives of

faith, hope, and charity, which ought to have the direction of his life, and may give teſtimony that his actions are the effects and works of theſe virtues.

And for this I know no better rule, than for every one to obſerve, how they proceed in performing ſuch duties, which ſometimes are contrary to all human intereſt, or at leaſt have no ſuch intereſt depending on them: If they are equally ſolicitous and faithful in ſatisfying theſe truly, they have then great reaſon to believe, that what they do are the works of faith, of hope, and of charity: But if it appears otherwiſe in them; that they are ever diligent and zealous in all things, that have a proſpect of ſome *gain* or *reputation* at the end of them; but in ſuch as have no connexion with theſe, and regard only God, his juſtice, and their ſouls good, are cold and careleſs; as in maſtering their own paſſions, avoiding the occaſions of ſin, by depriving themſelves of ſome temporal convenience, in maintaining the cauſe of juſtice and truth, with hazard to themſelves, in affording their ſouls due nouriſhment in daily reading and praying; truly all coldneſs and neglect in ſuch particulars, is enough to make them conclude, that worldly reſpects have a much greater ſhare in what they do, than the faith or love of God.

For if a paſtor, phyſician, or lawyer, there zealouſly gives attendance, where he has the encouragement of a temporal reward, and generally makes ſome excuſe when the poor are to be helped: If parents are careful to gratify their children in ſuch things which, like little charms, are fit to gain or increaſe their love, but omit all ſuch ways as are neceſſary to moderate their paſſions, and prepare them for a virtuous life: If ſervants are diligent under their maſter's eye, but are then wanting to their duty when they have no witneſs of their ſloth: This is very near a demonſtration, that all they do are not the works of faith, or of charity, but of intereſt and ſelf-love. And what proof then can theſe give of their being Chriſtians, who move not by the ſprings or principles of the goſpel, but go on in the very ſame method they would do, were they no pretenders to that profeſſion? And yet, O God, is not this the too general practice of thoſe that own that name? They ſay they have a faith of eternal goods, that they hope one day to be poſſeſſed of them, and that they love Thee: But where are the marks of this profeſſion, whilſt the love of themſelves, and the intereſt of this world, appear ſo viſibly in almoſt all they do? *Omnes quæ ſua ſunt quærunt*, I fear is their too general character; and how canſt Thou come

to be their eternal poſſeſſion, who here take ſo little care to ſeek Thee? Give ear, therefore, we beſeech Thee, to the prayers of all the juſt, whether on earth or in heaven, who are ever ſolicitous for the welfare of their brethren, and through the infinite merits of thy only Son, grant in the plentiful effuſion of thy grace, an effectual remedy to this evil.

Sixth Sunday after EPIPHANY

GOSPEL.

Matt. xiii. 31. Ends verſe 35.

THE *kingdom of heaven is like a grain of muſtard ſeed.* In this parable is given us by Chriſt an idea of the church and her doctrine, in appearing but inconſiderable in their beginning, and very great in their progreſs; for this is principally ſignified, both in the muſtard ſeed and leaven, which make up the ſubject of this goſpel. But becauſe theſe are marks, which in ſome kind belong to all that is human; there being no empire or religion, tho'. moſt abſurd, which have at any time grown powerful in the world, but what have been contemptible in their infancy, and firſt abettors, we muſt therefore ſee wherein theſe marks are particular to the church and doctrine of Chriſt.

The works of men are generally inconſiderable in their beginnings, but it is never by their own will and choice: they always aim at pomp and greatneſs, and if they accompliſh not their deſigns at the firſt at-

tempt, it is ever againſt their wills, and the only reaſon is, becauſe they cannot. For this cauſe, the moſt commanding empires of the world, never ſhewed the greateſt power in their firſt beginning, becauſe they had it not. And *Mahomet*, as ſoon as he was ſtrengthened by a number of followers, preſently took arms, and bent all his force to ſubject people to him. There is nothing of this in the little beginnings of the church: For its littleneſs was according to the choice and poſitive will of Chriſt. This will he manifeſted in himſelf, after the wonders at his birth, chuſing ſo many years of an obſcure and private life; and afterwards, tho' having all things ſubject to his power, never pretending to any degree of ſtate, or to any thing, that could render him great in the eyes of the world; his converſation was generally with the poor; to the poor he preached, not in courts, but in the deſart and mountains; his miracles were amongſt the diſtreſſed, and never before Princes; and tho' they were ſuch as both in number and manner, were never wrought by any other, yet they were much diminiſhed, and the glory of them eclipſed to the *Jews*, by his poverty, and the meanneſs of his living and retinue, chuſing thoſe for his followers, who had neither authority nor intereſt to gain up-

on the world. Thus was Chriſt little in all his ways, and all was the effect of his choice, and not of force.

The ſame is more viſible in the method he took for converting the world, making no uſe either of arms or power, but only of the preaching of a few fiſhermen; and eſtabliſhing his doctrine, not ſo much by miracles, as by that which is moſt contemptible in the world, even by their contempt, reproaches, perſecution, and ſuffering; all their perſuaſives being to deſpiſe that which inclination and cuſtom recommend as great and honourable, and ſetting a value upon nothing, but what the world deſpiſes; that is, upon ſuffering, forgiving, not retaliating, upon poverty, meekneſs, and humility. Thus was the church little in its beginning, both as to its foundation and head, who was Chriſt, as to its paſtors the apoſtles, as to the manner of being propagated, and its doctrine. And how did it ſoon become great, when within a few ages, it comprehended within its pale thoſe nations and people which had oppoſed it, when it ſpread from eaſt to weſt, and had the greateſt Emperors and Princes ſubjecting themſelves to its direction?

Now as the church was little in its origin, not by force, but by the expreſs will of God, and was reſembled by the muſtard-ſeed; ſo I

think in the ſame, all that are members of the church have directions for the general method they ought to take all their lives: The members of the church ought to follow the method of the church; and what Chriſt declared to be his choice for it, ſhews what is to be their choice.

And what is this method? They ought to chuſe to be little; they are to eſteem thoſe things moſt valuable, which the world moſt undervalues; they are not to affect noiſe and pomp, nor love any thing that draws the eyes of the world upon them: And as for greatneſs, they are chiefly to be ſolicitous for that only, which is the effect of thus voluntarily leſſening themſelves.

This is a hard leſſon for a world, wherein pride and ambition make up a torrent, which, with the violence of its ſtreams, carries away almoſt all that are borne into it; ſo that the abridgement of the Chriſtian's life, through this corruption, may be compriſed in theſe few words, of being eagerly bent upon magnifying himſelf, by all the vanity and pomp that is within his reach. This is but too viſible from the common practice of the world, where in proportion to what every one has received, ſo they endeavour to make a noiſe and ſhew, and ſeem to meaſure their happineſs by the number of their admirers.

This is the deſign in their table and dreſs, in their furniture and retinue; to this are turned whatever advantages they have of nature; this is the end of their education: ſo that inſtead of teaching youth the humility and ſelf-denial of the goſpel, they train them up in all the little arts of vanity, take pains to make them in love with themſelves, and fond of being admired by others.

Now for temporal and worldly ſouls to take this method is no wonder, becauſe theſe are the proper means to be temporally and worldly great; but for Chriſtian and believing ſouls to be ſo bent upon it, is a matter of juſt ſurpriſe; ſince the goſpel, which, they ſay, they believe and follow, leads them quite another way, and ſhews that the greatneſs, which they ought to ſeek, is to be the effect of their chuſing here to be little; and that for them to be ſolicitous for worldly greatneſs, is the ready way to be diſappointed in that more ſubſtantial glory, which is the end of their being and their faith. This is ſo true, that there is not any thing, tho' the moſt commendable duties of a Chriſtian ſtate, which loſe not their whole value, if performed with a deſign of growing in the eſteem of men; thus it is pronounced by Chriſt concerning alms-giving, faſting and prayer; and the apoſtle declares,

that if in his preaching the goſpel he ſhould be ſolicitous to pleaſe men, he upon this ſhould be no ſervant of Jeſus Chriſt. If this then be of ſuch a pernicious nature, that like a cancer, it eats out the marrow, and renders the beſt of actions not only uſeleſs, but turns them all into corruption; what muſt their unhappineſs be, who, in conſequence to their faith, pretending to live and labour for eternity, make it the main buſineſs of their life and labour, of their learning, goods, and money, to be great in the opinion of men, and magnify themſelves in this world? Is it not evident, that whatever they do of this kind is all loſt as to eternity; and that when the time of retribution comes, they ſhall be confounded with this reproachful check to all expectation, of their having already received their reward?

But what then, is all good to be done in the dark, leſt the obſervation of men ſhould deſtroy its whole value? The goſpel gives frequent cautions upon this ſubject, but ſo that Chriſtians are encouraged to let their light ſhine before men, for the example of others and the glory of God. A nice point for good works to be done ſo, as to be ſeen, and not that they may be ſeen. And yet ſo it is, that whoever does good, propoſing to himſelf

himſelf the commendation and applauſe of men, cuts off the entail, of whatever otherwiſe, would be a reward of ſuch good.

What then is to be the rule? No other, but what Chriſt has appointed: Chriſtians are to do good, to be a light to their neighbour, and that God may be glorified; this is the extent of their commiſſion; by this is to be regulated all they do; the edification of their neighbour and the glory of God, muſt give life to all their actions; and all the projects muſt be ſtifled, which are deſigned for earthly greatneſs, and have nothing but ſelf-love and pride to ſpur them on. Hence are to avoided all ſelf-commendations; applauſe is not to be ſought in good works, no intereſt is to be made for church preferment: If ſome ſtate is to be allowed, yet none ought to be loved; if decency requires ſome ornaments, pride ought not to be the interpreter, how far this ought to go: If a numerous family demands a plentiful proviſion, magnificence ought not to furniſh the table: If ſervants are to be commanded, it is not to be with an imperious haughtineſs: If failings are to be reproved, it is not to be with contempt or ſelf-eſteem.

Thus pride is to be baniſhed as induſtriouſly as we can; all is to be done without

noiſe and flutter; the ſoul is to be kept humble, the contempt and reproach of men is not to be regarded; and by this way of appearing but inconſiderable, are chriſtians to hope for that greatneſs which is the fruit of humility, and much more to the purpoſe, than that which the world gives, being the effect of pride, a fruit only ſuperficial, and no more laſting than its root.

This is thy goſpel, O Jeſus; it is that which chriſtians pretend to follow; but they ſeem to have another goſpel, even that which the world preaches to them, which is the rule of their conduct. But I know there is no ſalvation but from thine; and that if an angel ſhould come and teach any other, I ought not to hear it. Make me ſteady, therefore, I beſeech thee, to thy ſaving truths, and let not the world ſo prevail on me, as to forſake what thou haſt taught. This is my ſincere deſire, and may thy grace confirm me in this good will; that I may never ſeek either the eſteem or greatneſs of the world, but in an humble ſpirit, ever confeſs my own miſery, and never think of any other greatneſs, but thyſelf.

Septuageſima Sunday.

EPISTLE.

1 *Cor.* ix. 24. ends x. 5.

RUN ſo that you may gain the prize. With this day the church begins her preparation of the ſolemn faſt of *Lent* now approaching; and by the purple colour of her veſtments, and ſilencing the uſual *allelujahs* and hymns of joy in her publick ſervice, ſhe ſeems to expect, that by a general humiliation and mourning, her children ſhould prepare for this great faſt; that by this way they may obtain that grace, which is neceſſary for their due obſervance of it, and reaping that benefit, which ſhe deſigns them in ſatisfying the juſtice of God, and being cleanſed from all their ſins. For this end is propoſed to them in this Epiſtle the true ſtate of chriſtains in this life, and the true ſpirit, by which they are to prevent all the miſchiefs occaſioned by their own infirmities and wickedneſs. Their ſtate is repreſented by

the Apoſtle, in *Men running a race*, where he ſays, *All run, but all gain not the prize*: Wherefore, ſays he, *ſo run that you may gain it*. We are all now actually upon this race, all haſtening to an eternity: There is propoſed a prize of everlaſting bliſs: And who ſhall gain it? thoſe that run well. It is a point therefore every one ought ſeriouſly to conſider this day, and ſee, whether they make any advance towards it. Following the alluſion will be ſome help for their making a true judgment of themſelves: For, as in the race, thoſe who run from the mark, are not in a poſſibility of winning, if they turn not their courſe; but the more they go on, the farther they are out of the way: Thoſe who fall, are in a like impoſſibility, if they riſe not again, and, with new vigour, purſue their courſe: Thoſe who are at a ſtand, or go out of their way, are in evident danger of loſing the prize, if by extraordinary diligence they regain not the ground and time that was loſt: And only thoſe ſtand fair for the crown, who are ever careful with their beſt ſpeed to advance. So it is with us in the race of this life; and in proportion to this, may every one judge of himſelf. Tell me, therefore, dear chriſtian, what is thy ſtate; thou art on thy race, and believeſt heaven the recom-

pence of thoſe that win: How is it with thee? Doſt thou make forwards apace? Or art thou quite at a ſtand? Doſt thou go out of thy way? Doſt thou lie down in deſpair? Or doſt thou run ſtill farther from what thou pretendeſt to gain? Living in a ſinful ſtate, is running from the mark, and with thy back towards God and heaven: An immoderate affection of creatures, though in themſelves lawful, is going out of the way: Sloth and tepidity, is ſtanding quite ſtill, if it be not worſe: Anxiety and dejection, is lying on the ground; and only a love of God, a zeal for his law, and a ſincere repentance after ſin, is that which carries thee forward on thy way. Conſider now, art thou running forward or backward? Art thou at a ſtand, or going out of the way? The time granted for finiſhing the race is not long; when death comes, it will then appear, where thou art; and as thou art then found, ſo it will be with thee for ever: And will it not be a terrifying inſtance to thee, if when the time of thy race is expired, it ſhall be then found, thou haſt ſcarce ever ſeriouſly begun it; or, after a fervorous ſetting forth, haſt permitted trifles to ſtop thy courſe, or quite put thee out of the way? It is this misfortune the

church, as a tender mother, ſolicitous for all her children, is deſirous to prevent: And having reaſon to apprehend great numbers to be under theſe ill circumſtances, and that very few can pretend an exemption; therefore ſhe here lays before them ſuch means, as may be effectual for regaining the time, whatever has been loſt, and removing ſuch obſtacles as have hitherto been a hinderance to them in their way, and may be a great help for happily finiſhing that part of their race which is yet to come.

The firſt thing preſcribed, is included in thoſe words of St. *Paul*, where he ſays, that thoſe who pretend to carry the prize in any public game, *abſtain from all things* that may be a hindrance to them: And if they obſerve this method, who contend for a *corruptible crown;* how much more ought chriſtians to do the ſame, who are engaged for a *crown that is incorruptible?* It is the Apoſtle's inference, and carries with it this advice, that all chriſtians, who think in earneſt to gain this crown, are under a neceſſity of practiſing a like *rigorous abſtinence,* ſuch as not only regards their diet, but every thing which they experience to be a hinderance to them; *Ab omnibus ſe abſtinet.* It is the misfortune of this mortal ſtate, that our inclinations being

corrupt, lead us not only to what is inconvenient and dangerous, but likewiſe inconſiſtent with the well finiſhing our race; and it is the indulging and following theſe, puts as many as are put by, quite out of their way. Hence is the occaſion of all the ſtops and ſtands we make; hence all the hazard of loſing the crown. Now if our misfortune be in *following*, our happineſs muſt be in *denying* our inclinations, which the Apoſtle calls *abſtaining;* and it is only thus we can hope for ſucceſs. Every one muſt conſider for themſelves in what particulars this abſtinence is principally to be practiſed: Their general and moſt repeated faults will be their beſt direction; it may be in the government of the tongue, of the eyes, or affections; it may be in regard of company, divertiſements, or expences; it may be in the moderation of paſſion, fretfulneſs, vanity, covetouſneſs, ſelf-love; in the overcoming animoſities, ill-will, or ſloth. Whereſoever the exceſs has been, there muſt be now the abſtinence. This is the goſpel-expedient of ſelf-denial, neceſſary for removing all obſtacles out of our way, and putting us in the beſt method for coming to a happy end of our race, and gaining the crown.

But if ill habits prove obſtinate, and will not yield, neither muſt a chriſtian yield to them, but is under a kind of neceſſity of taking ſome more rigorous way, as may be adviſeable by thoſe, to whom it belongs to judge of this leproſy, and preſcribe its cure. The example of this Apoſtle is motive ſufficient, who being then upon the race, as we now are, *Ego quidem curro*, and not willing to hazard any thing in this important affair, though we know nothing of any neceſſity, yet for greater ſecurity practiſed this advice upon himſelf: *I chaſtiſe my body*, ſays he, *and bring it into ſubjection; leſt, while I preach to others, I myſelf ſhould become a reprobate.* Now if this great Apoſtle thought not fit to diſpenſe with himſelf in this kind of mortification, how vain muſt the arguments of our preſumption, niceneſs, and ſelf-love be, in favouring and exempting ourſelves, who ſtand ſo much more in need of it? If he, whoſe life was the continual practice of a moſt laborious charity, who otherwiſe ſuffered ſo much in faſting, watching, in priſons, and repeated martyrdoms, thought himſelf not yet ſecure enough, but ſtill added voluntary mortification to all the reſt, what can we pretend? It is a terrible leſſon, and ſuch as muſt neceſſarily raiſe confuſion, where it does not move to imitation.

In this double preſcription, the church prepares us for *Lent*, and lets us know what is expected from us. And do thou, O God, we beſeech thee, inſpire all thy ſervants with ſuch a true ſenſe of their ſtate, and with the reſolutions of uſing ſuch means, as may be now ſeaſonable, and moſt effectual for finiſhing well the race in which they are. Grant they may not run, as it were at hazard, by loſing the ſight of the place to which they pretend to go? Grant they may not fight, as it were beating the air, in preſuming to overcome, without mortifying their ſenſuality and concupiſcence; but that they may ſo diligently purſue their courſe, that at the end they may gain the crown.

Septuageſima Sunday.

GOSPEL.

Matt. xx. 1. ends verſe 16.

GO *you alſo into my vineyard.* The ſubject of this goſpel is a parable of the Maſter, who finding men ſtanding idle in the market, at ſeveral hours of the day, reproved them for their idleneſs, and ſent them to work in his vineyard. A ſeaſonable leſſon for this time, when being called upon by the church to prepare for *Lent*, now approaching, we may conſider the work we have to do, and enter into ſerious reſolutions of undertaking it, in obedience to his commands and mercy, who this day begins to ſummon us to work.

As many as are chriſtians are called to labour in the vineyard: This vineyard is of a larger extent to ſome than others: Thoſe, who have the charge of ſouls, have the greater taſk, becauſe they are not only to work for their own ſanctification, but alſo of as many others, as they have ſouls under their care.

Hence the labour they are called to, becomes immenſe: Firſt, in fitting themſelves for their obligation, both in acquiring learning, and the better qualifications of grace, which are abſolutely neceſſary for the diſcharge of the paſtoral function. 2dly, In giving aſſiſtance to thoſe under their charge, both in inſtruction, comforting, reproving, and exhorting, and ever proportioning their labour to the neceſſities of their flock, which being endleſs in one way or other, their labours muſt be ſo too. This is the poſture of their vineyard, and ſuch is to be their labour; in which there is to be neither vacation nor diſpenſation, but what is of force by their being diſabled. Wherefore, as for thoſe who are preparing for this function, if they give not demonſtration of an induſtrious, laborious, and vigorous ſpirit, whatever other advantages they may have of capacity, learning, and parts, they ſhould never have my vote for their promotion. Becauſe the charge is ſuch as cannot be ſatisfied without great labour; and to preſent ſuch as are of an idle, ſlothful, and ſluggiſh temper, and give little hopes of change, is to ſay, I chooſe thoſe for great labour, whom I think not fit, or likely to labour; Who would do thus, if he had work of his own to be done? Why there-

fore ſhall ſuch be choſen to work in Chriſt's vineyard? And as for thoſe who have already undertaken the charge; and yet live in a manner idle, I can only pity and pray for them, and deſire the ſame charity of others, that they may foreſee that evening, when all are to be called to receive their pay, and conſider in time what theirs will be: For if they are reproved, who are found idle in the market, what muſt they expect, who being hired to work, are found idle in the vineyard?

The vineyard and work of others is more confined, their principal buſineſs being to cultivate their own ſouls, and make them bring forth fruit to life everlaſting: But however, this is a work ſtill which obliges all to labour; for the ſoul of man, through its natural corruption, is like a barren ſoil, overgrown with thorns, covered with ſtones, without encloſure, open to all paſſengers, both men and beaſts. Thus it is rendered, by its perverſe inclinations, by its ſtubborn and carnal paſſions, by its eaſineſs in giving ear to the pleaſing flatteries of ſelf-love, the devil, and the world. Such is the vineyard of all chriſtians; and yet, barren as it is, it muſt bring forth fruit; this is their buſineſs; for this they are called to work: And can this be done without their working? A

plentiful harveſt may as reaſonably be expected from ground that lies common, as good fruit from the ſoul of man, if he ſits ſtill with his hands tied by ſloth, or his mind diſſipated with folly, vanity, or impertinency, ſo as to be little ſolicitous for the work he has to do. For how ſhall he be ſecure from the ſnares of ill company, ill example, and a deceitful world, if he be not daily watchful againſt their treacherous attempts? How ſhall his deſires and paſſions be ſubjected to the government of reaſon and faith, if inſtead of labouring by ſelf-denials to bring them into ſubjection, he feeds their corruption by undue liberties, and daily ſtrengthens them in their rebellion: How ſhall he diſcover his own weakneſſes, if he takes no care to obſerve them? How is he to expect help from above, if he be not ſolicitous in ſeeking it? How ſhall he abound in good works, if the obtaining thoſe virtues are no part of his concern, which are the ſeed from whence they muſt grow?

Hence appears the neceſſity of complying with the command given to every chriſtian, of *Go and work in the vineyard.* And if this work be not the great buſineſs of his life; if he be not watchful over all his ways; if he be not induſtrious in reading, zealous in

prayer, faithful in the diſcharge of all duties, reſolute in mortifying his interiour corruption, couragious in ſtanding againſt all aſſaults, the vineyard muſt neceſſarily be barren, the want of fruit will be the condemnation of his being an idle ſervant, and that having received a command of working, he has not worked.

Hence let all thoſe chriſtians call themſelves to an account, whoſe life being a continual diſſipation of thought betwixt vanities, divertiſements, and entertainments, who being fond of company, and the world, are ſolicitous to comply with its extravagant ways, and to purchaſe its favour, and their own ſenſual ſatisfactions, at any expence. Thoſe too, who ſpend their days in ſleeping, dreſſing, eating, viſiting, and gaming: And thoſe likewiſe, whoſe whole time is engroſſed by their worldly and covetous cares, ſo as to give little or no place to the concern of their ſouls: Let all theſe, I ſay, call themſelves to an account; and if they do not find their vineyards overgrown with thorns, that is, their ſouls remarkably vicious; yet without the ſpirit of prophecy, one may foretel there is ſcarcity of that good fruit, which is expected from the vineyards of Chriſt. For when I know there is ſome work not to be effected, but by much

labour; and am ſenſible there has been little care and pains uſed by thoſe that undertook it, it is obvious enough to conclude the work is not done. This muſt be the caſe of theſe chriſtians; they ſeldom are ſo induſtrious in any affair of their ſouls, as to ſeem to be ſerious, or in earneſt with it; where then can be the fruit which requires all the watchfulneſs and full ſtrength of a laborious ſoul? No, they are idle, they work not, and therefore it is no raſhneſs to ſay, their work is not done.

But where the moſt ſerious endeavours are uſed, the ſincere chriſtian is not to be diſcouraged, if he finds ſtill more work to do: For the work of the ſoul is like that of the vineyard, never at an end. There will be ſtill a neceſſity of new endeavours of cutting off what is ſuperfluous, of digging, manuring, fencing, watching: For why ſhould men be called to work in the vineyard to the end of the day? This therefore is the condition of the chriſtian's hire, to work till evening, that is, till the night of death cloſes his eyes; and he is neither to be tired with his labour, nor diſcouraged at the new occaſions of it; for as this repeated labour makes a good vintage, ſo it makes the ſoul fruitful. And though there may appear ſometimes weeds

ſhooting up, though there may be ſome barren and ſuperfluous branches, yet there may be a good vintage ſtill, if theſe are not neglected, but taken care of in time; ſo likewiſe in the ſoul; though weeds appear, though there be ſome dry and barren branches, though beaſts break in, yet if theſe are not favoured, but made the ſubject of the chriſtian's labour, there may be ſtill good fruit to recommend it to the maſter of the vineyard.

All then are to work; and if they are but faithful from the time they are called, whether early, or at mid-day, or at the laſt hour, they will all receive their hire, the laſt as well as the firſt, and no idleneſs antecedent to the call, will be any diſappointment in the pay. This is the aſſurance Chriſt himſelf has given, and is enough to baniſh all anxious fears, occaſioned by looking back on paſt diſorders. This is the leſſon, O Jeſus, thou giveſt us this day; give us likewiſe grace to follow it, that all ſloth and idleneſs being baniſhed from thy vineyard, we may all be faithful labourers, that holding on with patience till the evening comes, we may then be found at work, and receive that hire, which being promiſed by thy mercy, thy juſtice cannot deny us.

Sexageſima Sunday.

EPISTLE.

2 *Cor.* xi. 19. ends xii. 9.

I Have ſuffered in *labour and trouble, in much watching, in hunger and thirſt, in much faſting, in cold and nakedneſs.* The ſubject of this epiſtle is the commendations of St. *Paul*, and ſuch as he gives of himſelf, a thing ſeemingly unſuitable to a diſciple of the croſs, and a true profeſſor of humility. But it was what the ill circumſtances of the *Corinthians* had obliged him to, and was not the effect of vain glory, but of his great zeal and charity in deſiring their good, though with the hazard of being cenſured for pride and ſelf-conceit. In his abſence falſe apoſtles had inſinuated themſelves amongſt the *Corinthians*, and abuſing their credulity, corrupted them with errors: Upon which St. *Paul* writes this epiſtle in order to undeceive them, and for this end, lays before them the great advantages he had above their new teachers;

and that if they would conſider the greatneſs of his ſufferings, or the wonder of his revelations, they might have ſufficient motives to believe him a true apoſtle of Jeſus Chriſt, and hold faſt his doctrine; and that in departing from him, they had ſo far abandoned Chriſt himſelf: So that all his endeavours of raiſing an eſteem of himſelf in the minds of this people, was not to ſeek himſelf, but only to regain them to the Sovereign Paſtor and Biſhop of their ſouls. A good model for us, and ſuch I wiſh we could ſo follow, as never to ſay or do any thing in raiſing an eſteem of ourſelves, but only when forced to it for the good of others.

But now, while we ſee St. *Paul* endeavouring to prove himſelf an apoſtle of Jeſus Chriſt, and principally grounding his proof on the evidence of his ſufferings, may not we in this diſcover a good inſtruction the the Church deſigns for all the faithful, *viz.* If they deſire to give proof of their being true believers and diſciples of Chriſt, it cannot be better done than by ſuffering: It is propoſed to them at this time, becauſe we are now approaching to *Lent*, when all chriſtians are ſummoned to enter into a ſtate of penance, for the puniſhment of ſin, and breaking the ſtrength of thoſe paſſions,

whoſe violence has been the occaſion of their ſin; and, no queſtion, but thoſe who ſuffer truly for that end, will in this give teſtimony of their being true diſciples. There is ſcarce any ſin, but what is the effect of ſome ill habit or paſſion, and none can ſincerely deſire to remedy this, if they will not uſe proper means for the weakening ſuch paſſions: This brings an obligation of ſuffering ſomething in ſelf-denial and mortification. Again, there is no ſin but what we are obliged to forſake and repent of; now there being no ſincere repentance or converſion, where there is not an effectual deſire of ſatisfying the divine juſtice by worthy fruits of penance, this engages every repenting ſinner in a life of penance and ſuffering, proportioned to their ſins and to their ſtrength. And though cuſtom, or a juſt condeſcendence of the church, has remitted very much of the ancient rigour of faſting, and of thoſe laborious penances formerly impoſed on returning ſinners; yet no penitent can ſo think himſelf diſpenſed with, as if there was not now a like neceſſity of ſatisfying the divine juſtice, as in the primitive times; for though the diſcipline of the church may not, yet the juſtice of God, which is unchangeable, ſtill requires the ſame. This ought to be done

one way or other: Such whoſe health and circumſtances will not permit a compliance with thoſe auſterities and mortifications, which the church at this time recommends, would do well to recompence for it in ſome other ſelf-denials and good works. And therefore they are much to be commended, who, on juſt motives, requiring to be diſpenſed with, as to the rigour of faſting, deſire ſome other penal or pious obligation to be laid on them, whereby, though they faſt not, yet they may be included in the number of thoſe who ſuffer for their ſins. Thus every one, without exception, of all ages and conditions, have it in their power to give proof of their being Chriſt's diſciples, by ſuffering ſomething for the overcoming their own paſſions, and adding their mite to that treaſure of ſatisfactions, which they have in Chriſt, and which by this ſuitable concurrence and union of the members with their head, may be effectually applied to them, for the obtaining pardon of their ſins, and the full diſcharge of whatever debt they have contracted by them.

Hence may be plainly diſcovered the ill management of thoſe, who complying in ſome manner with the letter of the law, in eating but one meal a day, and a collation at night in *Lent*, take care ſo to ſtudy their

inclinations, as induſtriouſly to take off all manner of ſuffering and mortification from what they do, whether it be by their frequent ſupping of coffee, chocolate, or drinking ale or wine betwixt meals, without any kind of neceſſity, or making their collations ſo ſavoury, that through the whole *Lent* they cannot pretend to have puniſhed, but ever contrived to gratify and pleaſe themſelves. For though theſe ſatisfy themſelves in having complied with the law, and remove all ſcruples (notwithſtanding their wilful excluſion of all manner of mortification from their faſt) upon theſe two principles, of *the end of the law not falling under the law; and liquids not breaking the faſt:* Yet they muſt acknowledge it, even in the moſt favourable ſenſe, very ill management ſtill, who ſo order their affairs, as to comply with a law, and at the ſame time purpoſely exclude themſelves from all the benefit of it. Should they pay their money in this manner for the ſatisfying a debt, and ſo order the payment, that the debt ſhould appear ſtill in force againſt them, they would not only condemn this as an indiſcretion, but as an injuſtice done to themſelves, in depriving themſelves of the benefit of what they had done: It is likewiſe a very irrational way of acting; for

ſince all rational and human actions ought to have a regard to the end for which they are done; how can this way of faſting paſs for rational or human, which is not only not directed to its end, but where means are uſed on purpoſe to prevent its coming to that end, for which it is intended by God and his Church? Such a faſt, which is deſignedly perverted from its end, cannot be the Church faſt; and if they, who follow this undue method, think they do not break their faſt, I think they cannot pretend at leaſt to keep the *Lent* which the Church deſigns, but only ſuch as beaſts may keep; and I believe, were even outdone in this by the beaſts of *Nineve*. To exclude then voluntarily and by contrivance all mortification and ſuffering from the faſt of *Lent*, which are the end of the precept, cannot paſs for a juſt obſervance of the command; neither can they, who practiſe this method, prove themſelves true diſciples.

Sexageſima Sunday.

GOSPEL.

Luke viii. 4. ends verſe 15.

THE ſeed is the word of God: But this ſeed, however good in itſelf, brings not forth fruit, but according to the diſpoſition of the heart that receives it. The ſeed mentioned in this parable, was as good, which fell amongſt thorns, ſtony places, and by the way-ſide, as that which fell upon good ground; and while there it is barren, and here appears in a plentiful harveſt, the difference is in the earth, and not in the ſeed. This parable was plainly verified in the word of Chriſt himſelf, and of his apoſtles, who preaching to great numbers, and all alike having their ears open to their doctrine, in ſome it brought forth fruit and in others none. Many of the people, who were ſincere, not having their hearts prevented by any paſſion, admired what they heard and ſaw, and became followers of Chriſt, whilſt the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, being over-ruled

by pride, intereſt, and human reſpects put wrong conſtructions on all that was ſaid or done, and thus grew more obſtinate under all the evidence of truth and miracles.

Is not this enough to awaken all chriſtians, and, whilſt they ſeek for truth, either for the modelling of their conſciences by a right faith, or of their lives by the will of God, to oblige them to put their hearts into a diſpoſition of ſuch ſincerity and reſolution, that neither careleſſneſs, paſſion, or any worldly conſideration, ſhall make exceptions againſt that way, where the force of truth and right ſeems to lead them? Thus it ought to be, for otherwiſe, there needs no more to make void the ordinary means of grace; and a chriſtian that has had all the opportunities of receiving light, will, like the *Phariſees*, die in the dark. This is the unhappy fate of too many, who, by the viſits of a particular grace having heard and read enough for the converſion of a heathen, ſtand out againſt all ſuch attempts of mercy, upon the force of ſome impreſſions, which education or fear only had made in them; which putting a ſtrong bias on the judgment, wholly carry it out of the way; and ſo that truth, which at firſt ſeemed to touch them, becomes fruitleſs

fruitleſs as to all the good that was deſigned them.

But what then are to be the diſpoſitions of the heart, that God's word may take root in it? It is not to be hardened like the highway, nor open to every thing that paſſes; for in ſuch a heart it makes no impreſſion, but will be ſoon trampled under foot, or carried away by the next impertinency that occurs. It muſt not be diſordered with any violence of paſſion, which like ſtony ground, will not permit the ſeed to take root. It muſt not be diſturbed with an immoderate ſolicitude, for any thing that is worldly, whether pleaſure, riches, or the common concerns of life, becauſe theſe, like thorns, will choak it, and quite prevent its growth.

Theſe are the cautions, given in this goſpel: how great then ought to be the chriſtian's care? He has no hopes of ſalvation, but from God's word, bringing forth fruit in his ſoul: There is no true faith, but what is the fruit of this, and without this fruit he certainly abides in error: There can be no light or ſteadineſs, for walking in the way of God's commandments, but what muſt be the fruit of this; and without it, he unavoidably walks in the dark, and goes out of the way. What judg-

ment then is to be made of all thoſe, who have their hearts open to all manner of diſſipations, their heads turned with good fortune, or buſied in all kind of amuſing follies? What of thoſe, whoſe paſſions are ſo ſtrong that though they renounce not all exerciſes of piety, yet it is ever within ſuch bounds, that they ſeem to compound with heaven, leaving a reſerve for ſuch exceptions as their paſſions make? And what of thoſe, whoſe buſy ſouls are ſo overwhelmed with temporal concerns, that though they have light enough to ſee, yet have not liberty to think, or be ſerious in what is eternal; but whenever this begins to preſs, there is ſtill ſome neceſſary buſineſs to put it by, till another time; and yet this time they cannot find? I wiſh there were place to judge favourably of them, or that they had reaſon to do it of themſelves; but this goſpel allows of no ſuch favour, and ſhews that all their hopes are vain in pronouncing their indiſpoſitions to be ſuch, as hinders the word of God to be fruitful in them; and whence then can their ſalvation come?

Here then may chriſtians ſee what their preſent obligation is, and what muſt be the work of the approaching *Lent*. In this imperfect ſtate there cannot be expected either a total application to things divine, or an

abſolute exemption from diſordered paſſions, or the diſtracting world; theſe difficulties are the inſeparable conditions of this life; but ſince they cannot be divided from them, it muſt be their buſineſs not to be overcome by them. If nature be heavy, unwilling to look up, and more unwilling to take pains, in labouring to be good, it muſt be ſpurred on, and forced even againſt inclination: For if temper be averſe to all that is pious, and humour takes place of every exerciſe that is capable of amending it, what muſt be the conſequence, but that the natural man will be ſtrengthened in his corruption, and all the buſineſs of eternity brought into deſpair? And muſt not thoſe then, who find this difficulty thus prevailing in them, uſe ſome ſuitable means to overcome it? Truly if they give not ſome check to the diſtractions of their vain, curious, and unprofitable thoughts, and learn not to be ſerious in what concerns their ſoul, not only ſo as to read ſometimes and pray, but likewiſe to make this a buſineſs, to conſider upon the diſpoſition of their hearts, ſee what theſe diſorders are, and what muſt be their help, they muſt be numbered amongſt thoſe unhappy ones, who, figured by the highway, are never like to bring forth fruit.

If nature be ſubject to prevailing paſſions, ſuch as not only diſturb (for this may be the caſe of the beſt chriſtian) but alſo carry the heart with them through forbidden ways; ſo that though ſome duties are ſtill performed; yet ſeldom any that interfere with theſe; what muſt the chriſtian do? If he ſits ſtill in peace, as if all were well, he is certainly unhappy; and whatever fruit appears in him, it will be never ſuch as can be fit for harveſt. No, he muſt by watchful induſtry and labour ſtrive to overcome thoſe paſſions which make him ſo often tranſgreſs the law of God; and till he has gained ſo far, as to ſtand againſt their treacherous ſuggeſtions, his character can be no better than that of the ſtony ground; which, though receiving ſeed, will ſtill be barren, as to that fruit which is expected from him.

If a worldly ſolicitude takes up the ſoul, and it be bent with too much eagerneſs, either to gratify an idle or covetous temper, it is all one what the buſineſs is; for ſince the powers of the ſoul are ſo confined, that any immoderate and conſtant care for earth, renders impracticable the concern for heaven, as long as this undue ſolicitude remains, the beſt ſeed muſt here be fruitleſs; and there can be no remedy, but in moderating this

concern, and bringing the mind to juſter temper. If earth has its buſineſs, has not heaven its buſineſs too? And if the greater be wholly ſwallowed up by that which ought to be the leſs, is not here injuſtice in all this life? And where can the fruit be, when the good ſeed is thus daily choaked up by thorns and weeds?

Here then is the chriſtians taſk; if the ſeed of God's word be not fruitful in him, he is certainly miſerable; there are many things to prevent its growth; and there can be no ſecurity againſt miſcarriages, but from his watchfulneſs and labour. This ſpirit thou muſt give us, O God; help us therefore by thy heavenly grace; and ſince our dangers here are ſo many ways multiplied, let thy gifts be our preſervation, that neither by careleſſneſs, paſſions, or immoderate ſolicitude for earthly things, we may diſappoint the deſigns of thy goodneſs towards us; but having our hearts diſpoſed by thy grace, we may, like good earth, bring forth plentiful fruit of all we receive.

Quinquageſima Sunday.

EPISTLE.

1 *Cor.* xiii the whole Chapter.

IF I give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profits nothing. The church deſigning our keeping *Lent* ſhould be acceptable to God, and beneficial to our own ſouls, on this day takes care to propoſe to us one condition abſolutely neceſſary for this end. For aſſuring us from the Apoſtle, that the actions of the greateſt virtues, ſuch as are diſtributing all our goods to feed the poor, and giving our bodies to be burnt, are not at all available to ſalvation, if we have not charity; we are in this aſſured that the moſt exact and even rigorous obſervance of *Lent*, will profit nothing to our eternal good, if it be done without charity; and therefore, that whoever deſigns to keep a faſt, acceptable to God, and to his ſoul's advantage, ought to do his beſt, to be provided of this ſo neceſſary and in-

diſpenſable a virtue, that ſo he may not faſt in vain.

Now by this charity is not meant only *Giving to the poor*, as it is vulgarly underſtood; for the Apoſtle ſuppoſes one may diſtribute all he has to the poor, and yet be without charity: But by this charity is underſtood, the love of God and of our neighbour, a love which is the fulfilling of the whole law; and ſo it is deſcribed here by the Apoſtle, who gives this deſcription of it; *Charity is patient and mild; Charity is not envious, does nothing raſhly, it is not puffed up, it is not ambitious; it ſeeks not its own intereſt, it is not provoked, it thinks no evil, it rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, ſuffers all things, charity never fails.* And it is this charity every chriſtian ſhould have, who deſires to obſerve the approaching faſt, or perform any act of virtue, ſo as to find acceptance with God; for whatever he does without it profits nothing: A terrible ſentence, and ſuch as ought to put every one upon making great preparations in bringing their ſouls to this neceſſary diſpoſition, before they enter upon the faſt of *Lent*: and it being thus neceſſary, it cannot be improper to conſider it more in particular,

that ſo we may have the better opportunity of examining into the ſtate of our ſouls, not only in regard of this time, but all others, and of eternity too, ſince by this we are to ſtand or fall. We muſt have charity then; and what is it? What are the qualities of it? The Apoſtle anſwers; and hear it expounded by an excellent hand, in relation both to God, ourſelves, and our neighbour.

Charity is patient: It ſuffers all the ſeeming delays of God, and though ardently deſiring, yet peaceably waits his time. It is ſenſible of our own miſeries, bewails them before God, and ever waits for a deliverance. It quietly bears the imperfections of every neighbour, hopes for their amendment without impatience, and aſks it of God without being tired.

Charity is mild, ſubmitting to the conduct of God without oppoſition or diſquiet; peaceable and moderate are all its own actions, and far from giving any wilful diſturbance to others.

Charity is not envious, as to the glory which God enjoys, nor appropriates to itſelf his gifts; it rejoices that God is God, and gives daily thanks for his infinite glory. It is content for the method God takes in perfecting the inward man, at the expence,

humiliation, and mortification of the outward man. It rejoices in the good of others, as its own, and conſents they ſhould have the advantage of him.

Charity does nothing raſhly; performing all its duties to God with prudence, circumſpection and advice: For itſelf it does all according to diſcretion and meaſure; and for its neighbour, with conſideration and obſerving that order which God has eſtabliſhed.

Charity is not puffed up, nor ambitious; it loves God's greatneſs, and regards all things belonging to him with eſteem, reſpect, and religion: It is always little in its own eyes, diſeſteems whatever is from ourſelves, conſiders every neighbour in the moſt favourable ſenſe, and ourſelves beneath all.

Charity ſeeks not its own intereſt: It has principally, and above all things, the glory and will of God before its eyes, is ready to ſacrifice to theſe its own private intereſt and convenience, is jealous and fearful of ſeeking itſelf in what it does, and ſincerely endeavours to make every neighbour's intereſt its own.

Charity is not provoked: It ſubmits to the ſevereſt appointments of God in ſilence and undiſturbed; charges all whatever it ſuffers,

on our own ſins, but without diſquiet; and whatever zeal it has againſt ſin, it has ever compaſſion on the ſinner.

Charity thinks no evil: It is full of the ſanctity and juſtice of God, conſiders and juſtifies theſe in all things; and though it condemns our own ſins, yet, except where obliged, it ſees nothing but the good, which its neighbour has, and its heart is filled with deſigns and deſires, pure, holy, and edifying.

Charity rejoices not in iniquity: It laments every thing that diſhonours God, zealouſly takes part with his juſtice againſt our own ſins, bewails and puniſhes in us the ſins of others, however advantageous they may be to us.

Charity rejoices in the truth: It is happy even in this world, by entering into the participation of the joy, beauty, and triumph of that truth, which is the happineſs of the ſaints: It rejoices in the knowledge of that truth, which is ſo difficult in the practice, becauſe by this we ſhall be delivered from our own corruption: It loves good, wherever it is; the conformity to this it loves in every neighbour, and it is its joy to make them love it.

Charity bears all things: It adores the ſeverity of God's judgments, as much as

his patience and long-ſuffering; and whilſt it ſincerely endeavours to remedy, yet it bears with our own failings and humours, and more with thoſe of the perſons with whom we live.

Charity believes all things: It has no exception as to any thing of faith, becauſe God's authority and truth is equally in all; it embraces not only the divine myſteries, but likewiſe thoſe truths which preſcribe mortification and the croſs, the love of enemies, and pardoning injuries.

Charity hopes all things: Its hope has no more bounds, than the fidelity and power of God, which are infinite: It draws motives of hope from the conſideration of our own weakneſs and nothing; and hopes more for its neighbour than ourſelves, becauſe it believes others more faithful and more humble.

Charity ſuffers all things: It ſuffers all for God, becauſe this all is nothing, and God is all: It is never tired, and thinks it cannot ſuffer too much for ſalvation; and is ready to purchaſe its neighbour's eternal good at the expence of all.

Charity never fails: Becauſe it is the only virtue that ſhall never have end; being itſelf the end, perfection, and crown of all other virtues: It is the eternal bond

bond of all the members with one another, and with Jeſus Chriſt their head: It is by this both head and members ſhall be eternally conſummated in God, who is charity; It is this which ſhall make the ſacrifice and all the religion of heaven, in glorifying God for all eternity.

Here is the true deſcription of charity, without which neither faſting, nor any act of virtue or religion can find acceptance with God: It is that with which all chriſtians ought to be poſſeſſed, who ſincerely aim at eternity. And though this charity here in this life, can never come to that perfection, in which the bleſſed enjoy it in heaven; yet ſome degrees of it we ought to have; and it is to be our daily buſineſs ſo to advance in it, that we may have reaſon to hope, that notwithſtanding our daily overſights and failings, it is this which generally directs our life, and influences the main body of our actions. Such a degree of it, we ought to have at this time; but it muſt be the gift of thy mercy, O God; grant it therefore, we beſeech thee, to all the faithful, that entering now into a ſtate of penance, their faſting, their ſelf-denials, their prayers and alms may be regarded by thee; and be effectual to the cancelling all their ſins; ſince without it, we know, all will profit nothing.

Quinquageſima Sunday.

GOSPEL.

Luke xviii. 31. to the end.

BEhold we go up to Jeruſalem. They are the words of Chriſt to his apoſtles; who having taken them apart from the multitude, puts them in mind of all he was to ſuffer at *Jeruſalem*, and of his approaching paſſion. This goſpel is made choice of at this time, as a ſeaſonable leſſon to the faithful, to inform them, that as Chriſt always walked with his death in view, and made this diſpoſition of his whole life, to accompliſh the order of his father; ſo they, more eſpecially at this time, ought to call their thoughts to the remembrance of death, and make their beſt preparation for it.

For this end the church ſets up this day the bloody ſtandard; and by preſenting them with a lively view of Chriſt's ſufferings, ſhews them the cauſe in which they are engaged, the manner in which they are to fight, and the only hopes by which they are to expect a victory, ſo as to triumph

with Chriſt over ſin and death. In this firſt, reproaching their abſurd prophaneneſs, who taking now greater liberties than uſual in all that can be called extravagant; by gluttony, prepare for faſting; by exceſs, for ſelf-denials; and by prodigality, for helping the poor. This is a cuſtom, which from our genteel predeceſſors, has been tranſmitted down to our days; and though diſapproved, and ſtrongly oppoſed by the labours of pious paſtors, is ſtill ſupported by numbers; and even has thoſe to favour it, in a modeſt way, whoſe piety ſhould give them abhorrence of all ſuch practices; ſo that whilſt Chriſt calls to *Jeruſalem*, where the Son of Man is to be mocked, ſcourged, and crucified, they are ſo far from joining with him, in ſentiments of grief, for what he ſuffers, that by their ſinful extravagancies, they ſeem to take part with the *Jews*, in helping to mock, ſcourge, and crucify him. For what is it but a mockery, ſo groſly to pervert the deſign of the church at this time? Were the ſins of theſe few abuſed days to be laid open, I fear there would appear all that, which the Apoſtle declares to be crucifying Chriſt again, and trampling on his blood. As many then as have any reſpect for the church, and true concern for themſelves,

I think, ought to give ear to the preſent ſummons, and not run then more perverſely into *Babylon*, when they are called to go up to *Jeruſalem*.

But what is it to go up to *Jeruſalem*? It is to accompany Chriſt in the ſame diſpoſition with which he went up at this time, that is, with his thoughts on death, and all he was to ſuffer as a preparation to it. The faithful are to conſider in particular, what he ſuffered, and reflecting how much he made both his ſufferings and death the ſubject of his thoughts, for the better accompliſhment of his father's will, then ſee whether the ſame method be not more neceſſary for them; that when the hour comes, for the execution of that ſentence, which is already pronounced againſt them of going out of this world, they may be in a good preparation for ſubmitting to it.

Our natural corruption, and the daily indiſpoſitions, which are too apt to grow upon us, by our commerce with the world, and with the occaſions of ſin, increaſe the difficulties of dying well, rendering a due preparation for it ſo very neceſſary, that they muſt raſhly depend on undeſerved miracles, who entertain hopes of a happy death, without preparing for it by daily thoughts, and endeavours, ſuitable to ſo great a change.

For dying well, the ſoul ought to have ſuch a command over all its paſſions, as to keep ſteady to the law of God, notwithſtanding all the powerful ſolicitations that invite to ſin; ſo that it knows how to deſpiſe the charms of pleaſures, intereſt, and ambition, and cannot approve of any thing that is not licenſed by heaven. It ought to come to ſuch a degree of indifferency, as to earthly things, as notwithſtanding its ſtrongeſt ties, to be in a readineſs for forſaking all. It ought to have a contempt of the world, a deſire of being united with God. It ought to have a ſincere deteſtation for all paſt ſins; a reſolution of doing right to juſtice, in puniſhing them, and a perpetual watchfulneſs for preventing all relapſes.

Now let any chriſtian, that is ſenſible of our common weakneſs and corruption, conſider, whether it be reaſonable to leave the concern of dying well, to the hazards of the laſt hour; or whether there be not a neceſſity of making a long preparation for it. They who know how difficult a taſk it is, to bring all paſſions into a due ſubjection; to work the ſoul into a true deteſtation of what it naturally loves; to be in a readineſs, not only of forſaking earth, but ſo as to be fitted for heaven;

know too, that acccording to the ordinary methods of grace, time and labour are neceſſary for this work; and that for this end, all that ſeriouſly think of it, ought now to go up to *Jeruſalem*, and from the ſufferings of Chriſt, take a model of what they are to do.

He was wounded for our iniquities, he was wounded to heal us; but ſince the Apoſtle informs us, that Chriſt ſuffered, leaving us an example, we are not ſo to reſt in his wounds, as to believe his ſufferings to be our exemption, but our pattern; and ſuch an one, as will certainly give a value to whatever we undertake by his example, and render it effectual with God; and thus we are to make his death the beſt preparation for ours. Since therefore he was mocked, ſpit on, ſcourged, and crucified, and by theſe ſufferings, were puniſhed in his ſacred perſon our offences, we are now to follow the copy, and turn theſe very inſtruments of the divine juſtice againſt ourſelves, for the remedy of our diſorders, with this confidence, that what we do by the direction of that choice, which God made for the remedy and puniſhment of ſin, and by the example of Chriſt ſuffering for ſin, will not fail of having a good effect in us.

Here then may every good chriſtian, having firſt viewed Chriſt under all his paſſion, turn to himſelf, and ſay, It is I who have ſinned; all this weight of puniſhment ought to have fallen upon me; and now ſome part of it muſt fall, that ſo my paſt ſins may be puniſhed as juſtice requires, and proviſion made againſt thoſe dangers, which are occaſioned by the wilful indulgence of my natural corruption. I am no more to be a Jew, in mocking, ſpitting at, ſcourging, and crucifying Chriſt; but I am to give proof of my being a chriſtian, in turning all this, where it is due againſt my own ſins, and thoſe paſſions which put me in hazard of a relapſe. I will now begin to mock my own paſſions, and ſpit at them in ſcorn; in all their attempts I will ſay, What! are you to govern a ſoul redeemed by the blood of Chriſt? Do you expect ſtill to command? No, bow down rebellious evils, and be ſubject to him who is the Lord of all; you are ſlaves, and muſt obey. The will of God is my law, and to this muſt bend all that is within me. If you are ſtubborn, and ſtill claim the power you have ſo long uſurped, the ſcourge ſhall be my help; my fleſh and ſelf-will, which you have gratified, ſhall by repeated mortifications, ſuffer in proportion to the ſatis-

faction you have given them, and thus learn to be afraid of ſin. I have now begun, and there ſhall be no truce, till I have crucified all that is corrupt. It was not the Jews, but you, crucified the Lord of all; your own contrivance ſhall now fall on your own heads: and though you have the devil and world confederate, their power ſhall not prevail againſt him that ſtrengthens me, but all ſhall be crucified with you.

Thus muſt chriſtians, by viewing their dying Lord, learn to prepare for death; there is no other way of doing it well; and now being the time, when the church ſummons all to prayer, faſting, and doing of penance for ſins; ought not this to be the great taſk of this holy time, that, by a ſeparation from ſin, and all that diſpoſes to it, they may renew the memory of Chriſt's death, and prepare for their own? It is a hard thing to turn our hands againſt ourſelves; but if all our dangers are from ourſelves, and our paſſions be our greateſt enemies, what muſt we do? Either they muſt be brought into ſubjection, or we be overcome by them. This is our caſe: Help us, therefore, O God; and ſince the time thou now granteſt, is the effect of thy mercy; give us grace to make the beſt uſe

of it, in puniſhing ſin, and reforming the ſinner, leſt by neglecting this, we may never more have opportunity of providing againſt death, but be at length found unprepared.

Low Sunday.

EPISTLE.

1 *John* v. 4. ends verſe 10.

ALL that are born of God, overcome the world. To overcome the world, a chriſtian muſt be poſſeſſed of that inward conſtancy and ſtrength of mind, as to be proof againſt all the ſnares of this world, ſo as neither to be ſeduced by its errors, nor charmed with its flatteries, nor frighted by its terrors; but ever to keep on ſteady to his duty, ſo that nothing that is earthly ſhall be able either to perſuade or force him from it. The trial of this conſtancy frequently occurs, and there is ſcarce a day wherein the world makes not its attempts on every chriſtian, and ſeeks to overthrow or weaken him, either by its friendſhip or its frowns. But he that is born of God, overcomes the world; and that other conſequence is left to us to make: He that overcomes not the world, is not of God. It is our concern now to examine, which part belongs to us; whether we overcome the world, or are over-

come by it. To diſcover this, we may divide the world into four conſiderations, and regard it, *Firſt*, As to its vices. *Secondly*, As to the uſe of creatures. *Thirdly*, As to its misfortunes. *Fourthly*, As to the obligation or charge it brings on all that live in it. And if upon reflection, we find we overcome it not, as to all theſe diviſions, but yielding under ſome one part of it, are by its prevailing influence drawn from our duty to God, truly then we have reaſon to apprehend, that dreadful conſequence belongs to us; *That we are not of God.*

The caſe is very evident, as to the firſt part: For as many as purſue a ſinful courſe, and live under the guilt of any habitual vice whatever, are certainly ſlaves to ſome criminal paſſion, and conſequently have not overcome the world; therefore are not of God. For he that is of God, has overcome the world.

It is evident enough too, as to the ſecond part: For wherever a chriſtian is ſo violently bent on the enjoyment of thoſe creatures, which are in his command, whether it be in relation to his *divertiſement*, his *intereſt*, or *honour*, that through his over earneſt application to theſe, he is wanting to many conſiderable duties he

owes to God and his ſoul: It is plain ſuch an one has not overcome the world; ſince for the world he forſakes God, and conſequently is not of God. For ſince creatures were granted to man for no other end, than to be ſerviceable to him in the neceſſities and reaſonable conveniencies of life; and while he is labouring for heaven, to be referred by him to that laſt end, to the increaſe of whoſe honour all creatures ought to contribute in their degree; how can that chriſtian value himſelf as innocent, or anſwer thoſe purpoſes of our Creator, who having received variety of great bleſſings from his hand, refers them not again in the due uſe of them to him; but makes himſelf their laſt end; in all ſeeking himſelf, and ſtudying how to gratify in all he poſſeſſes, his own ſenſe and humour, which the good chriſtian ever labours to renounce and mortify? Is it not plain, that ſelf-love governs here, that the heart, the thoughts, the affections and deſires, are all poſſeſſed with this corruption; and that ſuch an one muſt give himſelf the lye, if he pretends to love God above all things, or to love him with all his heart and ſoul? Truly I cannot tell how favourably ſome may judge of themſelves in this caſe: But certainly ſuch an one has a very worldly

and ſenſual ſoul, indulges himſelf in many liberties too looſe for the narrow way of the goſpel; and upon an impartial examen, will be found accompanied with many conſiderable injuſtices both to God and his own ſoul; and will not bear the character of a conqueror, but ſervant of the world.

The ſame is to be concluded, as to the third part: For however the misfortunes and troubles of this life, whether temporal or ſpiritual, are naturally a clog upon the ſoul, and upon their firſt aſſault, a general hinderance to devotion; yet if a chriſtian, through uneaſineſs under them, either renounces his duty and profeſſion, for the obtaining of relief; or elſe voluntarily ſinks into ſuch a degree of dejection, that he will hear of no comfort, nor uſe any endeavours for ſubmiſſion and peace, certainly ſuch an one is conſiderably wanting in his duty, by living in an affected contradiction to the will of God, by diſowning the juſtice of that hand which inflicts the puniſhment, and betraying a very immoderate love of himſelf, or ſome other creature, even to the preferring it to God; whilſt for the diſappointment or loſs he ſuffers in it, he even renounces, in ſome manner, God himſelf. This is not to be underſtood of thoſe, who, ſurpriſed by

ſome

ſome ſudden grief, for a time are violently oppreſſed, but ſenſible of their weakneſs, are willing to uſe means to moderate, and endeavours to remove it; but of thoſe above mentioned, who being ſullen under their misfortune, obſtinately ſet themſelves againſt all methods proper for their cure: for theſe are ſo far from overcoming the world, that they are truly overwhelmed by it. Though, indeed, many others too, I fear, muſt come in here, and ſhare in this guilt: for ſince every degree of melancholy or inward grief naturally indiſpoſes the ſoul, for the due performing of the greateſt duties we owe to God, by oppreſſing the heart with a dead weight, and diſquieting the mind with groundleſs fears, and variety of impertinent fancies, there is too much reaſon to apprehend, that as far as any one culpably gives way to this diſtemper, ſo far off he is from conquering the world, and ſo far he has to anſwer for all the ill conſequences, which are the conſtant attendants of this indiſpoſition.

The ſame cenſure falls on thoſe who are overcome by the fourth part. For though to be diligent in the charge, which belongs to every one in their reſpective qualities, be a great duty; yet to be ſo bent on theſe worldly affairs, that the heart is wholly en-

gaged in them, that no attention, time, or thoughts, can be allowed to the care of the ſoul and Chriſtian duties; truly this is an extreme, which evidently ſhews a man to be overcome by the world; that he ſets earth above heaven, and this world above God. For though care in worldly profeſſions be recommended to a Chriſtian, yet when it riſes ſo high as to exclude all Chriſtianity, it becomes very criminal; and is as great a bar to ſalvation, as a life of vice. Therefore we ſee in the Goſpel, though the trying of oxen, ſeeing a farm, and marrying a wife, be things in themſelves very laudable, yet when the over-earneſt application to theſe takes a man off his other greater duties, and generally hinder him from attending to God, they are highly provoking; and we muſt not wonder at the ſevere ſentence pronounced againſt them: *Not one of thoſe men ſhall taſte my ſupper.* Hence many ſorts of profeſſions become very dangerous and unlawful; becauſe they thus wholly involve a man in the world, and take heaven out of his ſight: And I queſtion not, as there are many caſes, wherein father, mother, wife, land, *&c.* are to be forſaken; ſo likewiſe profeſſions too, when they evidently hazard our ſalvation, and put by all opportunities of providing for a better life.

This may be truly ſaid of the moſt perfect and apoſtolical profeſſion of miſſioners or paſtors. For when the great charge of other ſouls is the occaſion of neglecting their own, this is not according to the order of charity, but contrary to it. For though perfect charity be to be commended; yet how can charity be perfect, as St *Bernard* ſays to Pope *Eugenius*, if a man excludes himſelf? *Quomodo autem plena, te excluſo?* And if this be truly ſaid in regard of this perfect ſtate; with much more reaſon is it to take place as to all other callings and profeſſions, which either in the whole or part, are to be laid by, as they prove a general hinderance to ſalvation. Thus then, as we deſire to belong to God, it is our duty to overcome the world, as to every part of it; and this is to be effected by the victory of faith. Grant then, O God of mercy, that the faith of thoſe eternal goods thou haſt prepared for thoſe that love thee, may be ſo powerful in us, that the hopes of one day poſſeſſing them, may give us courage to contemn whatever is temporal.

Low Sunday.

GOSPEL.

John xx. 19. To the end.

JESUS *came and ſtood in the midſt, and ſaid to them, Peace be to you; and having ſaid this, ſhewed them his hands and ſide.* Chriſt manifeſting himſelf to his apoſtles, ever gives them his peace, and at this time in particular, informs them on what his peace ought to be grounded, by ſhewing them his hands and his ſide, and letting them ſee the marks of the wounds he had received for them. Happy apoſtles, who here have the bleſſings of a peace, ſuch as the world cannot give, and are taught to build it on a ſure foundation, ſuch as cannot poſſibly fail! Happy Chriſtians, who on this day can enter into the participation of this bleſſing, and in the wounds of their Redeemer find peace amidſt all the tumults of the world, the war of the fleſh, and the aſſaults of a malicious enemy! Grant us, O Jeſus, this peace in Thee. And let us ſee, what peace he gives.

In the wounds of Jeſus is to be found peace amidſt the enquiries of a working imagination, and the diſtruſtful ſuggeſtions of an incredulous temper: For the wounds of Chriſt command peace to all theſe, in giving proof of his being God. Such a proof they were to St *Thomas*, in one of the inſtances in his goſpel, when having put his fingers into his ſacred wounds, he publiſhed this confeſſion of Chriſt's divinity; *Dominus meus et Deus meus; my Lord and my God.* In this, acknowledging not only the truth of his reſurrection, but likewiſe of all that he had advanced of himſelf, and conſequently, that this was the idea Chriſt had imprinted in his apoſtles of himſelf, both by his words and miracles; and the anſwer of Chriſt is an authentic confirmation of the truth of this confeſſion; *Thou haſt believed;* Thomas, *becauſe thou haſt ſeen me: Bleſſed are they who have not ſeen, and yet have believed.*

If Chriſt then be acknowledged to be God, the eſtabliſhment of the church is of God, the promiſes made to it for teaching truth to the end of the world, are of God; the command of believing it, is of God: And what then is the faith of Chriſtians, in aſſenting to the doctrines of the church, but a faith built on God, a faith which has

God's infinite truth for its ſupport, and his indiſputable authority, which ſets it above all exception? And is not this enough to give peace and ſecurity to a Chriſtian ſoul? Cannot he here walk on with ſafety; ſince whatever the darkneſs be, he has nothing leſs than God to command him to go on, and his ſolemn word engaged for his going right? Cannot he here reſt with ſecurity in ſuch a guide? And what then are all doubts, fears, and objections, made againſt the doctrines thus delivered to him? They are no more than the workings of an unſettled imagination, or the reaſoning of men in matters above all human reaſon; and what is imagination, or weak reaſon, in compariſon of God? What ſecurity can they give like to his? Or can it be ſuitable even to common reaſon, to queſtion the appointments of God, to doubt of his direction, to diſobey his poſitive command, upon difficulties moved by theſe? Is not this to prefer uncertainty to infinite truth, and man to God? Thus then the Chriſtian, from Chriſt's ſacred wounds, confeſſing with St *Thomas*, Chriſt to be God, partakes of that peace given to the apoſtles, and reſts in a calm of an unerring faith, amidſt all attempts that can poſſibly be made againſt it.

As theſe give peace to his faith, ſo they do likewiſe to his hope, which being equally divine virtues, are equally built on God; faith on his infinite truth, and hope on his incomprehenſible goodneſs. And as this truth quiets all doubts, which lead to infidelity; ſo this goodneſs moderates all fears which lead to deſpair. However therefore the knowledge of his own ingratitude, and the memory of his numberleſs ſins, give him frequent diſturbance, and ſet him at ſuch a diſtance from heaven, that he ſees no place in himſelf, but for deſpair; yet when he looks on the wounds of his Redeemer, and in them ſees what a price has been paid for ſin, what an advocate he has to the father, and from them takes the meaſure of God's mercy, here he begins to raiſe up his mind, and finds ſo much grounds for hope, that there is no more place left for deſpair. This is to be the refuge of all repenting ſinners, as often as the horror of paſt ſins ſpreads a darkneſs on their ſpirits, and with a heavy night oppreſſes their thoughts: Then it is they are to ſeek comfort in the paſſion of Chriſt; and putting this in the balance againſt their crimes, ſee if its infinite value be not enough to cancel all their debt. Teach me, O Jeſus, here to take ſhelter againſt de-

ſpair, that no apprehenſion of guilt may diminiſh in my ſoul, the hope I ought to have in thee.

The ſame afford peace under all the diſtracting troubles of this life; for though ſuffering cauſes great uneaſineſs, and afflictions generally bring ſuch diſorder with them, as to threaten the ſoul with confuſion; yet, when in the wounds of Chriſt is manifeſted, how much ſuffering is honoured in his ſacred paſſion, how available it is for the remiſſion of ſin, how it unites true believers with their head, how glorious is the reward of thoſe that ſuffer with patience! Here comfort begins to flow in upon the ſoul, and peace accompanies the greateſt ſtorm: In this manner all in trouble are to endeavour to raiſe up their ſouls from under the weight that oppreſſes, by the inſtruction of Chriſt's wounds, which teach a ſubmiſſion to the orders of God, and require an approbation of whatever his juſtice appoints, with a confidence, that all is deſigned for their eternal good. And this will certainly be the effect, if uniting their ſufferings with Chriſt's, they endeavour to ſuffer in his ſpirit; that is, with an entire ſubjection to the divine will, and ever labouring to ſuppreſs the reſentments of their rebellious nature, by acknowledging his juſtice,

and making all that is within them bend to his appointment.

The ſame again eſtabliſh peace with our neighbour: For we no ſooner behold the wounds Chriſt received, but we are put in mind, that all he ſuffered was for ſinners, for thoſe who were his enemies; we are put in mind of the manner in which he ſuffered, that is, in an humble ſilence, without opening his mouth: And is not this an inſtruction to us, of how univerſal an extent our charity ought to be? That it is not to be checked by the diſlikes we ſuppoſe or find in our neighbour, not by any ill offices they do us; but that, by Chriſt's example, we are to preſerve our charity ſtill inviolable, though we can ſhew the wounds we have received from others malice. This is the leſſon of charity here given us, to ſuffer with patience, and yet to love thoſe from whom we ſuffer: To ſuffer in ſilence, and never to look on the provocation others give us, as a warrant for our paſſion or uncharitable complaints: They may be eſteemed ſo by unbelievers; but this muſt not be the practice of thoſe who have learnt Chriſt.

In this manner the wounds of Chriſt teach us a univerſal peace; but ſince the leſſons are difficult, it is thou, O Jeſus muſt

imprint them in our hearts, and force our corruption by the power of grace, to yield to thy inſtructions. Proclaim then peace this day, we beſeech thee, to our ſouls, and ſo eſtabliſh thy example in our hearts, that we may follow the ways of peace amidſt all attempts made againſt us. Let neither our faith be weakened by doubts, nor our hope by diſtruſt, nor our charity by any provocations; and let no ſort of troubles be able to overthrow that peace we ought to have in thee. Thou haſt ſaid, *Pax vobis; peace be to you*: Grant us now, O Jeſus, this bleſſing.

Second Sunday after Easter.

EPISTLE.

1 *Pet.* ii. 21. to the end.

CHRIST *ſuffered for us, leaving us an example that we may follow his ſteps.* The rule is plain, and the obligation of our following it very expreſs: So that the ſufferings of Chriſt were not only undertaken by him, as our *Redeemer*; but likewiſe as our *Maſter* and *Teacher*; to ſet us a pattern of what our lives ought to be. Whilſt therefore I conſider the laborious and perſecuted life of Chriſt, and his cruel death, it is not enough for me to give him thanks for this moſt plentiful redemption wrought by him; but I am to imprint a lively idea of all his ſufferings deep in my ſoul, and remember, theſe are to be my model; and that if I offer not myſelf to accept whatever portion of them he ſhall aſſign for me, I ſhall by no means be looked on as a true diſciple of ſuch a maſter. It is on this condition heaven is promiſed us:

Si tamen compatimur, ut et conglorificemur: And whoever renounces the condition, renounces the promiſe; if we ſuffer not with him, we cannot reign with him.

Not that a Chriſtian, by his profeſſion, is obliged to ſeek reproaches, diſgraces, or priſons: It is generally enough to reſolve ſteadily to walk on in the way of *juſtice*, and that no flatteries or fears ſhould oblige him to forſake it. The being true to ſuch a reſolution will be generally attended with variety of ſufferings. Some will ariſe within, occaſioned from the continual war with corrupt inclinations, and the repeated aſſaults of a troubleſome enemy; theſe will often give diſquiet, and cauſe ſuch uneaſineſs to a ſincere ſoul, as to force it to break forth ſometimes into ſighs and groans; others will fall heavy from abroad, ſince the aſſerting the cauſe of juſtice, innocence, and truth, cannot eſcape long in this world of iniquity, without drawing great inconveniencies, and ſometimes ruin on the undertaker; and the higher degree he holds in the world, the more he is expoſed to greater miſchiefs: It being very difficult to maintain any eminent poſt in the world, without diſguiſing truth and abandoning juſtice on occaſions; ſo that he that is reſolute never to yield under any injuſtice, can hardly

keep his ground, but muſt look to be overthrown, one manner or other.

The bearing patiently theſe evils, which thus occur, according to the diſpoſition of one's life, might go a great way to the making up a true diſciple of Chriſt; and it is in this part, the greateſt number of thoſe who pretend to be his followers, are very conſiderably wanting. The pious, and ſuch as aim at devotion, are often impatient, even to a great fault, under the importunity of temptations, and at the frequent experience of their own weakneſs, in not ſtanding their ground with that conſtancy, or not arriving to that degree of peaceable and undiſturbed devotion, as they deſire; upon which many times falling into great anxiety and diſquiets, they indiſcreetly add new faults to the former; when they ſhould be, with great ſubmiſſion of ſpirit, practiſing humility and patience, and in this ſuffering follow their maſter.

Others are ſtill more to blame, who foreſeeing any little occaſion of ſuffering, either through their own fault, or accidentally falling upon them, are ready with a lye to ward it off and ſecure themſelves; being ſo apprehenſive of ſuffering the leaſt correction, or inconvenience, that to keep themſelves harmleſs, as they think, they de-

fend themſelves with untruths, and draw on them God's anger, for the eſcaping that of men. The natural unwillingneſs they have to ſuffer, ever putting them on this unchriſtian artifice. Another as unjuſtifiable as this they make uſe of, when any other occaſion of ſuffering preſents itſelf; as when they are wrongfully accuſed, or blamed without fault; for inſtead of quietly and patiently bearing this humiliation, they generally fall into a paſſion, conceive an ill will againſt the parties concerned, and for reparation of their own credit, are not ſatisfied till they have caſt a blemiſh on their neighbours. Thus though meekneſs, patience, and doing good for evil, be what Chriſtians pretend to, as the marks of their profeſſion, yet amongſt how very few are theſe found? For go into the crowd of them, and inſtead of their peaceably embracing the opportunities of ſuffering, you will hear threats for threats, paſſion for paſſion, curſing for curſing; and malice, detraction, and ill-will, you will ſcarce ſee any where without like returns.

In ſpiritual affairs again, it is much the ſame ſpirit governs; the natural averſion to ſuffering, ſo far influencing the greateſt part, that in thoſe very exerciſes, in which it is intended they ſhould ſuffer, they fru-

ſtrate the deſigns of the church, and ever ſtudy to avoid it. Thus they are ingenious to find ways to faſt, without faſting, that is, without almoſt any ſort of mortification: They do penance for their ſins, without penance; that is, without any of thoſe penitential works, bearing the leaſt proportion to their crimes: And as to other duties of reſtitution, moderation, temperance, ſelf-denial, taking up the croſs, charity, purity, hating the world, *&c.* they have ſtretched theſe ſo far beyond all bounds, and made them conveniently bend ſo near to the inclinations of fleſh and blood, that truly a Chriſtian life, as now in practice, is not a very laborious one; but admits of ſo much exceſs, gluttony, overreaching, cozening, animoſities, prodigalities, pride, and all manner of ſatisfactions and liberties, that are not the very depth of ſin, that I think it has but little of the Goſpel in it; and is ſo very eaſy and commodious, as to this world, that there is too much reaſon to ſuſpect it.

And if, reflecting now upon the whole, we conſider wherein it is we follow the example of our Lord, in peaceably ſuffering, according to the copy he has ſet us, truly, it is hard to find it: For how do we imitate him, whilſt he voluntarily choſe to ſuffer, and we take all the care we can to avoid it?

How are we his followers, whilſt we take a way quite contrary to his example, uſing all poſſible endeavours to decline whatever is capable of mortifying us; and whenever we are ſurpriſed with it againſt our wills, we then render it uſeleſs and unchriſtian, by paſſion or impatience? O bleſſed Redeemer, how far is this from the true character of thy diſciple? Thou haſt ſuffered, to teach us to ſuffer; and if thy example has no effect on me, but I am ſtill ſolicitous to gratify my own inclinations, rather than be directed by thy rule, how can I pretend to be thy follower? And if reigning with thee, be promiſed upon condition of ſuffering, is it not plain, by avoiding ſuffering, I ſet heaven at a greater diſtance from me?

Second Sunday after EASTER.

GOSPEL.

John. x. 11. Ends verſe 16.

I *Am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd gives his life for his ſheep.* Chriſt filled up his character in a very particular manner, giving his life for the ſalvation of man, in his prayers, in his labours, in his journeys, in his preaching, in his miracles, in all he did, in all he ſuffered, and at the end, offering it a ſacrifice on the croſs for their redemption. A paſtor cannot be good, but by continual endeavours for coming up to this character. His daily buſineſs muſt be to give his life for his ſheep. He muſt give his labour for them in taking pains for their inſtruction, and being ever ready to comfort and aſſiſt them in all their ſpiritual neceſſities. He muſt give thoughts for them in a perpetual ſolicitude for their good. He muſt give his prayers for them, in daily petitioning in their behalf, and in rendering God propitious to them. He muſt give his peace

for them, by drawing upon himself the dislikes, calumnies, and insults of men, by those unwelcome truths which his duty obliges him to speak. He must give his friends for them, by letting no considerations prevail for his conniving at such things which cannot be tolerated without prejudice to innocence or justice, and cannot be reproved but with his loss. He must give away many satisfactions for them, in considering not only what is lawful, but likewise what is expedient; that so he may not give offence to the weak, nor encouragement to the vicious. *Many things may be in themselves indifferent, and yet are not so to him; because an ill use is likely to be made of them by some of the flock, for justifying themselves in such things which are unjustifiable. Hence how many inclinations must he renounce, that so his life may not countenance, but be a standing censure of their disorders who are under his care, and which he is obliged by his post to study all ways to redress? If, therefore, he observes a general failing in the flock, in the love of vanity and pride; and that by the expensive support of these evils, children, families, and poor are robbed; must not his life preach up the humility and poverty of the gospel in such a dress, that pride and affectation may take no shelter under his ex-*

ample? And if circumſtances are ſuch as will not allow the habit of his profeſſion, muſt not he, at leaſt, come as near it as he can, and not let the iniquity of the times be made a plea for a vain and extravagant humour? If the vice of his flock be intemperance in drink, and miſſpending both time and money in idle company, to the neglect both of ſoul and family duties; ought not his example to be the condemnation of their crimes, by ſcrupulouſly declining ſuch company and idle meetings, and never ſetting foot within thoſe places of ſin; that ſo the exceſſes of the flock may have no countenance from his indiſcreet, though otherwiſe innocent, diverſiſement? If the ſin of the flock be in extravagant gaming, in neglect of order, or family diſcipline, or covetouſneſs; ought not he to ſhew his abhorrence of their evil ways, by never joining with their prodigality, nor even ſtanding to be a witneſs of it; by being exact in the order of his life, and keeping good hours; and avoiding every thing that betrays a love of intereſt and money, or has the look of a greedy or graſping humour.

In this manner he ought to preach againſt the diſorders of his flock, and condemn all their irregularities by his example; thus he is to be Lux mundi, *a light ſhewing the way of God's commandments. And if this cannot be, but by violence to inclination, it is the taſk he has*

undertaken, and without it he cannot ſatisfy the duties of his charge. He cannot deſerve the character of good, but by giving his life for his ſheep, and in this manner he is daily to give it for them: For if nature and corruption ſo far prevail, that his ſolicitude is more for his own quiet and intereſt than the good of the flock; if by his example he encourages thoſe evils in them which he ought to reform, he is not to be eſteemed a ſhepherd, but an hireling; and it is well if he be not found to have taken part with the wolves, in helping to devour thoſe whom he undertook to preſerve.

This character then of Chriſt being the Good Shepherd is particularly deſigned for the direction of paſtors: But there is another in this Goſpel, which is for the inſtruction both of paſtors and people; that is, where Chriſt ſays, *I know my ſheep, and my ſheep know me.* All that are in the fold of Chriſt, in whatever degree, cannot be truly his ſheep, except they know Chriſt as they are known by him. The reaſon is, becauſe they are to follow him; and how ſhall they do this if they do not know him? He has taught them by his example what they are to do: And hence St. *Auguſtin* ſays, The Son of God became incarnate, not only to redeem us by ſuffering, but alſo, that being made man, he might be an example to us

of all virtues. By his example he taught us the love of our neighbour; *Love one another even as I have loved you.* He has taught us meekneſs; *Learn of me, becauſe I am meek, and humble of heart.* He has taught us to forgive injuries; *Bear with one another, and forgive one another; if any one has a complaint againſt another: As our Lord hath forgiven you, ſo do you alſo forgive.* He has taught us to ſuffer reproaches: *The diſciple is not above his maſter; if they have called the maſter of the family* Beelzebub, *how much more thoſe of his houſehold?* He has taught us to ſuffer perſecution; *The ſervant is not greater than his maſter: If they have perſecuted me, they will perſecute you alſo; If they hate you, know that they have firſt hated me.*

Now Chriſt having given himſelf for a rule, how ſhall they follow it if they know not him? There is a neceſſity then of knowing Chriſt; and there can be no hopes, either of a virtuous life, or the fruit of it, (which is eternal happineſs) but what is built upon this knowledge; whence St. *John* ſays, *This is life everlaſting, to know thee the only God, and whom thou haſt ſent, Jeſus Chriſt.* Where this knowledge is not, men muſt neceſſarily walk, as St. *Paul* ſaid to the *Epheſians*, in the vanity of their own

ſenſe, having their underſtanding clouded with darkneſs; for this darkneſs is what every one brings with him into the world, and it cannot be removed but by Chriſt, who is the light that enlightens every one that comes into the world. What then muſt Chriſtians do? If they think of following Chriſt, they muſt learn to know Chriſt, and him crucified, becauſe they cannot abide in Chriſt except they walk as he walked. If the paſtors know him, they will, like him, give their lives for their ſheep. If the flock know him, they will make his example their rule, and their practice will be in all charity, patience, meekneſs, and humility, becauſe this is the way he has ſhewed them.

What then is all other knowledge without this? What is the learning of paſtors if they know not Chriſt? By other ſciences they may gain applauſe with men; but it is by the ſtudy of Chriſt only they can ſave their own ſouls, and guide their flock in the ways of ſalvation. What are all other arts and accompliſhments of the flock? They may be ornamental or gainful as to this world; but what help are they for gaining that which is eternal?

Does not then the Chriſtian world forget its Chriſtianity, when all the expence in the

education of youth is to teach them to be vain, to be in love with themſelves, and to count the admiration of others; when the great concern is in modes and carriage, and the leaſt part of their care is to learn Chriſt; nay, when they ſo far follow the world as to forget Chriſt and his Spirit, and let a univerſal pride be authoriſed amongſt them; do not they forget their Chriſtianity, whilſt fraud, injuſtice, oppreſſion, malice, diſſenſions, animoſities, revenge, &c. are in ſuch repute, that there is more danger of becoming a reproach amongſt them by ſtrictly following the Goſpel, than by forſaking it? Is this to be a Chriſtian? It is but too plain therefore, O Jeſus, that amongſt thoſe who profeſs thy name, there are but few that know thee. A great zeal is pretended for religion, but where is the zeal for walking by thy example, and manifeſting thy Goſpel by the practice of our lives? Teach us, therefore, we beſeech thee, to be more ſincere in what we profeſs; enlarge our knowledge of thee; give us a docile heart, that we may in all things hear thy voice, and not be followers of the world while we make profeſſion of following thee; for thus only can we be thy ſheep, and thou our paſtor.

Third Sunday after EASTER.

EPISTLE.

1 *Pet.* ii. 11. Ends verſe 18.

BRETHREN, *I exhort you, as ſtrangers and travellers, to abſtain from carnal deſires, which war againſt the ſoul.* The directions and method of a Chriſtian life is fully compriſed in theſe two words of *ſtrangers* and *travellers*; in both which the apoſtle informs us, that we are not of this world, that we belong to another; that as long as we are in this world, we ought to conſider it as a ſtrange country, and that, as travellers, we are only going through it. As therefore ſtrangers are not allowed to purchaſe in a foreign country, nor ſettle an inheritance there; as travellers ſtop not on their journey, but only to inform themſelves of the neareſt and ſafeſt way home: They march diligently whilſt it is day, and for reſt and nouriſhment they only take what is neceſſary to enable them to perform their journey: If they are reviled or affronted on their way, they go on ſtill, make a jeſt

jeſt of it, and let no ſort of anger or ill-will ſeize their ſpirits, nor think in the leaſt of any revenge: If they ſee what delights them, whether as to houſes, ſports, company, entertainments, *&c.* theſe raiſe ſome pleaſing thoughts indeed: And though they may ſtop to caſt a paſſing eye, yet they go on ſtill, not daring to take part in theſe diverſions, leſt thus hindered, they ſhould not reach their home. Thus their main concern is ever to advance, and to deny themſelves every thing, that may either ſtop or clog them in the way. If it rains or blows, they go on with patience through it, hoping it will ſoon give over: If the ways are uneaſy, heavy, or deep, they march on ſtill, hoping before long, the ways will mend.

Oh! that we could thus go through this world, and ever eſteem ourſelves no otherwiſe than ſtrangers or travellers: How would this put us upon paſſing by whatever is dangerous or hurtful to us, and never let us ſtop ſo eaſily at what delights, without reflecting how far ſuch amuſements may hinder us from ever ſeeing our journey's end? How ſhould we paſs by many inconveniencies without concern; and be careful never to burthen ourſelves with ſo much buſineſs of the Inn, as to forget

that we have farther ſtill to go? Heaven is our country, and as we are chriſtians, it is thither we pretend. Art thou now going on, dear chriſtian? Or art thou at a ſtand? Or goeſt thou backward? If buſineſs hinder thee, remember, the great buſineſs of one that is on the way is to be going on: There are many things thou wouldeſt willingly be doing on a journey, but only thou canſt not ſtay: The buſineſs that hinders thee from going to heaven, is not thine, and muſt either be laid aſide, or the concern of it muſt be leſſened. If troubles hinder thee, learn to manage them right, and they'll help thee forward. If it be ſloth that hinders, ſpur on the beaſt. But if it be thy pleaſures and paſſions; theſe muſt neceſſarily be avoided and reformed. *I exhort you to abſtain from carnal deſires, which war againſt the ſoul.* Every thing is carnal, that keeps thee from God. Whatever it be, that is not thy duty, or in order to it, is only to feed ſome paſſion; and thou wilt ſoon diſcover, it is the corruption of thy heart, which withdrawing thee from God, puts thee upon ſeeking other ſatisfactions out of him. And all theſe generally war againſt the ſoul; for the ſoul being deſigned for an inheritance above, and the poſ-

ſeſſion of an eternal Good, all things created are much beneath that end, and all affections to them muſt greatly prejudice the ſoul; the ſtronger theſe are, the more they weaken the deſires of heaven; they ſtop the chriſtian on his way, make him in love with his Inn, and cauſe an unwillingneſs to leave it; and is not this injurious to his great concern; whilſt, as the love of the world grows in him, ſo in proportion is diminiſhed the love of God? The heart of man is very ſtrait, affections of no kind can riſe there to any degree, but it muſt neceſſarily be to the leſſening of ſome others: And it is thus the wicked and even unwary chriſtians, in their pilgrimage below, come by degrees to forget they are ſtrangers and travellers here.

Another caution the Apoſtle gives to as many as are on this journey; that is, to edify all by good example and holy converſation. For this is a duty common to every chriſtian, to be ſo watchful in all their actions, as to do nothing that may offend or ſcandalize their neighbour: It being impoſſible there ſhould be true charity, where one prefers his own particular ſatisfaction before the ſalvation of others: Salvation, I ſay, for though there be no fault in me, when ſome, through a diſ-

poſition notoriouſly unjuſt, are ſcandalized at actions truly good and beneficial to my ſoul; yet there can be no excuſe for thoſe, who yielding to the violence of their own deſires, live in the continual practice of great diſorders, and ſuch liberties, which give ſufficient grounds of offence to others, and make ſtrangers blaſpheme that church whoſe members they are, as guilty of encouraging thoſe vices which they ſee practiſed by ſuch as belong to it. In this number muſt be included all thoſe, who culpably live in the ill habit of curſing, ſwearing, lying, drinking, covetouſneſs, or cheating: Such as uſe immodeſt diſcourſes or actions, ſuch as give themſelves to paſſion, revenge, or backbiting, who thro' careleſneſs neglect their families, through prodigality or vain expences expoſe them to ruin, and through a life of idleneſs, betray a want of application to the means of bliſs: In fine, all thoſe whoſe lives run counter to their profeſſion, who anſwer not the obligations of their ſtate or charge, whether eccleſiaſtic or civil: All theſe with infinite others, if not reformed, will find no place for excuſe; but muſt be condemned as enemies to themſelves, in thus evidently hazarding their eternal welfare; to their neighbours, in giving them ſcan-

dal and ill example; and to their church, in giving juſt occaſion to ſtrangers to revile and blaſpheme it. If theſe could but frame a true idea of their own ſtate, and ſee how many ſouls are defiled with ſin, how many lie buried in hell, drawn into this ſtate of miſery through their ill example: If they could ſee how many have been diſcouraged from ſeeking the truth, and quite put out of the way, by the ſcandal of their liberties: If they could hear how many blaſphemies are caſt out againſt God's church, occaſioned by their looſe and unexemplar lives: This proſpect would either oblige them to reform their ways, by entering into the rigours of penance, or if obſtinate in their ſin, caſt them into deſpair: For truly, it is accompanied with ſo many dreadful conſequences, if conſidered in all its branches, into which it unhappily ſpreads itſelf, that it muſt needs terrify a chriſtian, to think, how many ſouls he muſt give an account of beſides his own; and when he comes to reflect, the part he has acted in this life, has been that of devils, in ſuggeſting and propagating ſin, and betraying ſouls to hell, it muſt be a very powerful grace to preſerve him from making this concluſion; That his crime having a reſemblance

with the devils, must certainly be as unpardonable as theirs. Look, O God of mercy, on these unhappy christians, and by the effect of thy grace, reclaim them from their evil ways; preserve them from all despair; and turn their feet into the the ways of thy commandments. Pardon us all our sins, and forgive all those, who have been misled by our ill example. Direct our lives in the paths of moderation and prudence, that we may edify every neighbour, and thus contribute to the removing that scandal, which others vices and indiscretion have drawn upon us.

Third Sunday after Eaſter.

GOSPEL.

John xvi. 16. Ends verſe 22.

A Little while, and now you ſhall not ſee me; and again a little while, and you ſhall ſee me. Chriſt exerciſed his Apoſtles with this change of his abſence and preſence He abſented himſelf from them by his death; he again was preſent with them by his reſurrection: He abſented himſelf from them by his aſcending into Heaven; he again was preſent, by taking them, after their deaths, into the participation of his glory. This ſame is the exerciſe he gives to all his elect; ſometimes ſeeming to leave them, and then comforting them again with his preſence; and by this conduct, through divers changes, he prepares them for a more conſtant diſpoſition of ſoul, and leads them to a ſtate unchangeable. He lets neither their ſtorms nor calms be here without interruption, but with a wonderful variety

mixes both extremes. This St. *Chryſoſtom* obſerves particularly in St. *Joſeph*, who, by a ſingular privilege of grace, being choſen ſpouſe to the mother of Chriſt, was not however privileged from theſe trials: For obſerving the bleſſed Virgin to be with child, his ſpirit was overwhelmed with great diſquiets; but preſently an angel is ſent, who removes all his fears. Then ſeeing Jeſus born, his ſoul is enlarged with unſpeakable joy; but this joy is ſoon followed with a ſurpriſing terror, when he ſees the whole city in commotion, and a jealous king ſeeking the life of the child. This terror is again ſweetened with unexpected comforts, when an unuſual ſtar brings the wiſe men from the eaſt, to adore, and make their offerings to their new-born King: But this comfort is checked with new dangers; *Herod* deſigns to deſtroy the child, and they muſt retire into a foreign land.

If this was the method of God with this holy patriarch, and Jeſus is no ſooner born into the world but he has his ſhare in it; muſt not all faithful ſouls here prepare themſelves againſt all ſurprize, if they experience no comforts laſting, and that their moſt deſirable peace is interrupted with frequent diſquiets? Their buſineſs

ought rather to be, in learning to ſubmit to this order of Providence, and to make that improvement under it, as is deſigned by him, whoſe wiſdom cannot be queſtioned in the appointment.

There is no diſpoſition more neceſſary for a chriſtian, than that of a true diſeſteem of himſelf, and of all things in this world: And nothing can lead more directly to this, than the experience of his own inconſtancy, and of all other things about him. It is good, he ſhould be convinced, that all things paſs, and that his moſt ſettled judgments are uncertain. How often does he think, when he is under the weight of evils, that he ſhall never more have comfort? And yet he finds relief again, either by being delivered from his oppreſſion, or in the patient ſupport of that which before he believed to be intolerable. How often does he imagine, in time of interior peace, that he ſhall never more be moved: *Dixi in abundantia mea, non movebor in æternum*; and the weakneſs that follows upon this preſumption, does it not more full convince him of his inconſtancy, than if he had been never forced from his ground?

By theſe viciſſitudes then, and changes, he comes at length to frame this ſettled

judgment of himſelf; That he is without force, without vigour; that he has nothing of his own to truſt to; and therefore is in a neceſſary dependence on the divine grace, to ſecure him againſt the conſequences of his own weakneſs and uncertainty. By the experience of this inconſtancy, he learns to deſire with more earneſtneſs that unchangeable reſt, which, in the other life, ſhall be the recompence of the juſt, and to ſeek eſtabliſhment in the divine grace, whereby he may come to that happy ſtate.

The chriſtian then muſt ſet this down for a ſtanding principle; that uniformity is not to be expected in this life, either as to body or ſoul. This principle, when under trouble, is to be his defence againſt anxiety and deſpair; the ſame, in time of peace, is to balance his mind againſt exceſs of confidence and preſumption. For ſince Chriſt here in expreſs terms foretold his apoſtles, that they ſhould weep and mourn, while the world rejoiced; all the true ſervants of Chriſt may hence know, what portion to expect, and in this place of baniſhment, rather to look for trouble than peace. This is unavoidable, as to their ſpiritual ſtate; becauſe this life being appointed them, not to live

to themselves, and the world, but to learn to die to both, by a laborious disengagement from all carnal and corrupt affections, which is the death of the old man, represented by the death of Christ; hence the whole time of christians here, comes to be a life of mourning and tears, because there is no forsaking that without grief, which is retained with satisfaction; and has pleasure in the enjoyment; there is no dying to the world without trouble and violence, since it is by this violence they must die to the world: And is it not hence plain, that while the world rejoices, they must be in mourning; since, while those of the world are waiting upon their inclinations, studying always to gratify both themselves and the world, and turning all the blessings of God to this vile end, these are labouring to mortify the same inclinations, by denying them what with most earnestness they desire?

Again, as to their temporal affairs, they cannot fail of frequent occasions of mourning; because, on the one side, God designing to perfect them in what they propose, permits them not to have long rest or satisfaction in creatures; and therefore on the motive of his goodness towards them, sometimes deprives them of

one object of their affections, ſometimes of another; and other ways thwarts them with many difficulties, that by theſe trials they may come to know themſelves, and obſerving thus both their wants and weakneſſes, may ſee which way to direct their labours and prayers, and ſo gain a more perfect command of themſelves. Then on the other ſide, the world ſeldom fails of giving them many uneaſy exerciſes. Firſt, By the courſe of its profeſſed impiety and injuſtice, which they cannot ſee without grief. Secondly, By raiſing jealouſies, calumnies, and ſcandals, in their diſfavour; and often managing theſe with ſo much dexterity, as to draw even the good into an intereſt againſt them. Thirdly, By making the ways of virtue, ſo difficult, that they cannot poſſibly eſpouſe the cauſe of juſtice, innocence, and truth, but by making all thoſe their enemies, who love nothing but flattery and diſſimulation, and cannot bear either oppoſition or reproof, though in the moſt unwarrantable ways, without being exaſperated againſt thoſe that undertake it; whence all that know them are under the neceſſity of betraying the cauſe of virtue, by a baſe connivance, or of loſing their favour, by being advocates for it. Thus

the portion of the good, either from one ſide or other, comes to have a great mixture of bitterneſs in it, and the words of Chriſt are generally verified in them: *Amen, Amen*, I ſay to you, you ſhall mourn and weep, but the world ſhall rejoice.

But however, though theſe difficulties ſhould continue even till death, there is ſtill this comfort, that all theſe evils, as Chriſt has promiſed, ſhall in the other life be changed into endleſs joys; and can it be then reaſonable to make a difficulty in ſubmitting to them? For what are the evils of this life, in compariſon of eternity? They are not ſo much as a minute in proportion to our life, and who would not embrace ſo ſhort a ſuffering, when it is for avoiding that which is eternal, and to be recompenſed with joy that is infinite? We are all, one way or other, in continual ſolicitude and labour; and what is it generally for, but ſuch things, whoſe quiet enjoyment is many times ſhorter than the trouble of getting them; and when otherwiſe, it is for that which muſt ſoon end? Since therefore we are here to ſuffer, is it not the beſt management, ſo to order it, that it may be the purchaſe of everlaſting happineſs! Thus, O God, may we learn

to be wise. Give us grace peaceably to submit to all thy appointments; may neither quiet make us presume, nor troubles deject us; but may all be balanced with such moderation of spirit, as to improve both in calms and storms.

Fourth Sunday after EASTER.

EPISTLE.

St. James i. 17. Ends verſe 21.

BE ſlow to anger. The Apoſtle having ſhewn, that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights, preſcribes afterwards ſome means proper to diſpoſe our ſouls, that thoſe gifts may not be loſt on us, but that they may abundantly bring forth fruit, in due ſeaſon: And amongſt ſome others, is that ſet down now mentioned; That we ſhould be *ſlow* to *anger:* And the reaſon he gives, is, becauſe *the anger of man works not the juſtice of God.* In which words he, in ſhort, but fully deſcribes the miſchievous effects of this paſſion; letting us know, that when this has once ſeized the heart, it renders it unfit for complying with the laws of God, and diſcharging thoſe great duties he exacts from us. For the moſt immediate effect it has upon us, is to caſt a blind upon, or at leaſt, diſturb

our reaſon; ſo that at that time it is not capable of diſcerning or judging any thing aright: And when the eye, that ſhould direct us, is thus clouded, is it not to be expected, that whatever elſe depends on its conduct, ſhould be out of order? How can a man ſhoot at a mark, when he has a cloud of duſt or ſmoke before him? It can be nothing but raſhneſs to undertake it. This is our caſe; for paſſion is both duſt and ſmoke to our reaſon; and while all our other faculties are of their nature blind, and reaſon that is to guide them, is become blind too; all we do then, can be little better than the blind leading the blind; and this is not walking on in the way of duty or precept, but running into the ditch.

And when reaſon is once thus indiſpoſed, that it is not capable of diſcerning, it is likewiſe uncapable of governing too: And what then becomes of all thoſe violent paſſions, that are under its charge? they all break looſe; then *fears* and *jealouſies*, *ſuſpicions*, *ill-will*, *hatred*, *malice*, *revenge*, with all the reſt, make their attempts, and like a mob in a diſordered government, pretend to counſel, direct, and rule; and that amongſt them, which moſt favours conſtitution or convenience, and

counterfeits reason best, ever gets the reins: So that at that time, a man is not under the government of reason, but of fear, hatred, or some other passion: and what possibility of a christian's acting then according to duty, when he is not in a condition of acting according to reason: Hence the effects of anger become prejudicial to all states.

First, To christians, as to their devotions; they being very much indisposed for prayers, meditation, reading, or going to the sacraments, as long as their minds are disturbed with this passion: For these duties requiring a great serenity and calm of spirit, can never be performed well in a storm: For though they may use some weak endeavours, in order to raise their thoughts to God; yet the aggrievance, whatever it be, so naturally and violently returns, that it soon takes up the heart, to the exclusion of all that is good; and then, instead of prayer, there is nothing but a gathering of dark clouds, ready to break forth into storms and thunder. They are alike then unfit for all good works, as of *charity*, &c. for the mind being galled, every thing then frets it, and they cannot be willing or easy in admitting any good proposals.

Secondly, It is prejudicial to them in the ordering the affairs of the ſoul: for though the anger be ſuch, which ſeems moſt juſtifiable, as occaſioned from the diſpleaſure of their own ſins, infirmities or relapſes; yet when once it comes to cauſe an anxiety, diſquiet, melancholy or fretfulneſs within them, they are then unfit for framing any true judgment of themſelves, or determining what method is moſt expedient for them; it is then they are in danger of being deluded by an indiſcreet zeal, into ſome raſh or violent undertaking; or if it happens upon a melancholy or frightful temper, to ſink into all manner of dejection, be ready to give all over for loſt, and conclude that praying, and all the endeavours of amendment, are to no purpoſe: Thus they are in danger of running out of the way, on one ſide or the other. And therefore are ſtrictly obliged to adhere to ſome prudent and experienced director, thus to eſcape the danger of being miſled by themſelves; being at that time ſo expoſed to miſtakes, that however poſitive they may ſeem in their own thoughts, they may yet generally ſuſpect themſelves, and even conclude they are in the wrong: It being not then their reaſon that directs, but paſſion or fear, both which are very

unsafe guides, such as a wise man ought not to trust a very inconsiderable affair to, much less his soul.

Thirdly, It has ill effects in treating of matters of religion: For when a person undertakes to be advocate for truth, and either by the peevish prejudice, obstinacy, or false charges of an adversary, is by degrees warmed into a passion, he then certainly injures the cause he undertakes to defend; there being nothing that renders a man more averse to truth, than to hear it pressed with violence and anger; these being sufficient even to change a well inclined person into a professed enemy; there being very few, who seem willing to be informed, but have too much pride to own themselves overcome; and therefore this rough method seems nothing less than a temptation to draw men into the sin against the Holy Ghost, by provoking them to oppugn the known truth. Meekness is a necessary qualification of an Apostle, it is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost; those who undertake the cause of truth without this, fight not with the arms of Christ or his Holy Spirit; and cannot expect a blessing from above; since though our redeemer, sending his Apostles abroad with the mildness of

ſheep, promiſed to be with them; yet they can claim nothing of this, who laying by the ſheep, are turned into wolves.

Fourthly, It is pernicious to all parents, maſters and ſuperiors in regard of ſuch as are under their charge: For though theſe have a right to reprehend and correct, when a juſt occaſion requires it, and the omiſſion of this is a great fault, often attended with very ill conſequences; yet certainly St. *Thereſa*'s advice, of *Never reprehending any one in anger*, ought to be the rule of their practice, if they deſire to ſee any fruits of their correction: For they that reprove others in a paſſion, do it generally to ſatisfy themſelves, and in compliance with their own impatience; and generally betray ſo great a weakneſs, in the doing it, with ſo much of unkindneſs, ill-will, and even exceeding the bounds of truth and juſtice, that it is ever likely to produce much greater effects of paſſion, ſtubborneſs and contempt, than any thoughts of amendment. Furious or paſſionate correction is therefore carefully to be avoided by thoſe, who have others under their care; if like good chriſtians, they deſire to benefit thoſe recommended to them; and cure the evils to which they are ſubject.

But if avoiding this exceſs they fall into another degree of this paſſion, which

is, of being ever uneaſy, out of humour, ready to fret and quarrel upon ever trivial occaſion, this is a leſs noiſy evil, but not leſs pernicious than the former; and, I fear has as many degrees of madneſs in it. It makes parents and maſters unfit for all thoſe purpoſes to which their ſtate calls them; and cauſes ſo great uneaſineſs in all under their care, that truly there can be no comfort in a family, where this canker is ever gnawing at the breaſt of the ſuperiors, which is not only a diſturbance to them, but likewiſe to all that belong to them: Upon which conſideration, the guilt of many ſins muſt neceſſarily be charged on it. And I am apt to think, amongſt the many occaſions given to young people of being diſobedient, of taking ill courſes, of unhappily diſpoſing of themſelves both to their diſadvantage and diſcredit, is the uneaſineſs they find at home under the government of humourſome, peeviſh and jealous parents: from which the deſire of being delivered, puts them upon very raſh and unjuſtifiable methods. I fear it cauſes not leſs miſchief betwixt man and wife.

Now all manner of paſſion being of ſo pernicious a temper, the Apoſtle had great reaſon to command us, to be ſlow

to anger, as not working the justice of God, and it ought to be our daily care, to remedy whatever degree of it we observe in ourselves. It is the occasion of many evils, and because hard to be mastered requires a watchful eye and laborious hand. The enemy and corrupt nature is ever suggesting arguments to make it appear reasonable: but upon reflection, we have too great reason to suspect it: since the reasons we have, are too much in favour of our inclination and impatience.

Fourth Sunday after Eaſter.

GOSPEL.

John xvi 5. Ends verſe 15.

I Go to him that ſent me, and none of you aſk me, Whither doſt thou go? The Apoſtles were ſo much ſeized with the news of Chriſt's departure from them, and of the perſecution they were to ſuffer, that they thought not of enquiring whither he was going, nor how they were to prepare to follow him: But Chriſt knowing the weakneſs of man, and diſtinguiſhing betwixt that want of attention, which is occaſioned by indifferency and coldneſs, and that, which is the effect of ſome ſurprize caſting a preſent damp on the ſpirits, does not preſs the Apoſtles on this point, but giving them a paſſing reproof to remind them of their weakneſs, comforts them in the following words; I ſay to you the truth; it is convenient for you that I go: For if I go not, the comforter will not come to you.

It is impoſſible ſo to live, amidſt the various occurrences of this world, but that

ſometimes chriſtians will be under the ſame oppreſſion with the Apoſtles at this time, and ſadneſs will fill their hearts. The many ties we have in this world of nature and affection, the dependence we have on friends, the great intereſt we have for our ſubſiſtence, the concern we have in the publick, the ſolicitude we are bound to have for the well-being of our corporal and ſpiritual ſtate, all afford matter for this diſturbance; becauſe there is not one of theſe things, to which we are thus linked by affection or intereſt, but what are all ſubject to change, and ſuch change as cannot but make ſome impreſſion of ſadneſs upon the mind. This is the effect of a weakneſs inſeparable from our condition in this mortal ſtate, which being made ſenſible, cannot but feel when it is touched to the quick in any ſenſible part; but however, if this goes no farther than it did in the Apoſtles, by way of ſurprize, tho' it be a hinderance to the greateſt duties, in putting a ſtop to all, yet it is a weakneſs, that carries its excuſe with it, and deſerves rather compaſſion, than any ſharp reproof. This may ſerve for a caution to all tender ſouls, not to diſquiet themſelves with the apprehenſion of having grievouſly offended, when they have been thus ſurprized

prized with grief; as likewiſe to thoſe, under whoſe care they are, to endeavour to heal ſuch wounds, rather with lenitives that comfort, than corroſives, which exaſperate the ſore; leſt, otherwiſe, they increaſe the trouble, tho' they change the ſubject, in making them more unreaſonably anxious for their imagined offence, than they were for their misfortune; which tho' having now a better face, is yet as prejudicial to the ſoul, and more difficult to be cured.

But the caſe is very different, if ſuch ſurprizing grief be either careleſly or affectedly indulged; for then, what was an excuſable weakneſs in the beginning, becomes criminal in the progreſs; for there is nothing, except profeſſed vice, more deſtructive of all that is good; it being one of the moſt ſubtle contrivances of the enemy, by which he overthrows virtue, without the appearance of vice: It being by this way he ſo weakens the ſpirits, as firſt to render the ſoul incapable of all brave attempts, ſuch as are neceſſary in the ſoldiers of Chriſt; then takes off all reliſh of ſpiritual duties, perſuades them they are all uſeleſs, and to no purpoſe; thus, by degrees, he leſſens both faith and hope, oppreſſing the mind with darkneſs and fears, and ſuggeſting ſuch crowds of wild imaginations, not ſparing even the

Divinity itſelf, that it is now upon the brink of deſpair, and nothing but a miraculous grace can ſupport it againſt the force of theſe terrors.

Where it does not ariſe to this height, it is however attended with ſo many ill conſequences, either of a ſlothful heavineſs, or a peeviſh uneaſineſs, or of perplexing the conſcience with endleſs fears, that it ought to be every Chriſtian's care to defend himſelf againſt it; even ſo, as not to give way to any degree of anxiety, melancholy, or dejection upon any account whatever; for that there is a certain indiſcretion in all ſuch yielding; and it can ſeldom be done without the guilt of ſin, by putting that to the hazard of an ungovernable paſſion, which ought to be preſerved with greater care.

But their danger is not from grief only, but from whatever elſe ſo poſſeſſes the mind, as to put by all concern of obſerving the way in which they are, and of the place to which they ought to go. This was the overſight here reproved in the apoſtles; their trouble upon the thoughts of loſing their maſter, was in itſelf innocent, and could deſerve no cenſure; but whilſt it ſo takes up their mind, as to exclude all enquiry of the way in which they are to go,

here it becomes reprovable, and is no longer to be tolerated in them. All Chriſtians have the ſame way to go, as the apoſtles had; and there being a daily neceſſity of obſerving whether they go right, all that muſt be ſet down as faulty which hinders them from making this enquiry. The queſtion therefore they are every day to put to themſelves is, Whether going on in the way, in which they at preſent are, will bring them to their journey's end? For if this be not a part of their conſtant concern, their profeſſion and faith are vain, and their religion will avail them nothing. It is not enough to obſerve, that they give ſome time to prayer and reading, and that they make reſolutions of doing well; for this may be no more than looking towards the end of their journey, accompanied with ſome weak deſires of coming at length to it; but as propoſing a journey and preparing for it, will never bring a man to the end, if, after ſuch propoſals, he goes out of the way that leads to it: So it is here; for if Chriſtians every day think of heaven, and pray to come to it, and afterwards are but little ſolicitous of their ſteps, but live on in ſuch a way as to have their backs turned upon God and his commandments, is this likely ever to bring them to him?

This is rather the folly of him mentioned in the goſpel, who, beginning to build a a tower, had not wherewith to finiſh it. Chriſtian, thou haſt undertaken a journey; art thou in a way of finiſhing it? Will the method of thy preſent life bring thee to heaven? If death ſhould now ſeize thee, is thy ſoul in a diſpoſition of being united to God? Is it thy daily buſineſs to keep the commandments? Doſt thou walk according to the ſpirit of Chriſt, and his goſpel, by ſeriouſly labouring to overcome the world, and to ſubdue all thoſe paſſions which carry thee from God? If this work be not yet done, where is the ſtop? If thou haſt often attempted it, but without effect, is not this a ſign of ſomething being wanting in thee; that thou muſt yet take more pains, be ſtill more in earneſt than hitherto; and that if thou goeſt on at thy uſual rate, thy work will never be done?

Here is the examen, this the enquiry thou art daily to make of thyſelf. If thou art wanting in it, it is an argument of thy thoughts being otherwiſe taken up; and be aſſured, whatever it be, that ſo poſſeſſes thy mind, as to exclude this neceſſary enquiry, it is all of evil. If it be the immoderate love of the world, or of thyſelf; if it be ſenſuality, intemperance, or other vice,

theſe are doubly evil, both in themſelves, and in withdrawing thee from thy only neceſſary work. If it be fondneſs of company or divertiſements, if the eagerneſs of gain, if an exceſſive ſolicitude for thy worldly affairs, *&c.* tho' the principal object of theſe be never ſo innocent; yet can that be eſteemed innocent which takes thy heart from God, and excludes all that ſolicitude, by which thou ſhouldſt look into thyſelf, and conſider of the ways that lead to him? What if theſe very motives ſhould prevail on thee to be unjuſt to thy neighbour, couldſt thou then eſteem thyſelf guiltleſs? And art thou leſs criminal, when by them thou art drawn into the greateſt of all injuſtices, which is that againſt thy own ſoul and thy God.

Deceive not therefore thyſelf, for tho' with all thy care thou canſt not be exempt from ſome failings; yet if thou comeſt to that degree of indifferency or neglect, as not to obſerve thy ways, nor conſider of the place to which thou art going, let the occaſion of it be what it will, it is a criminal ſtate, and ſuch as admits of no excuſe. O God, if this be ſo, how unhappy are we, amidſt the neceſſary engagements, the grateful ſolicitations and diſtracting terrors of this life! We cannot but feel them, and yet to open our hearts

to them, cannot be without danger of excluding thee. Eſtabliſh us, we beſeech thee, amidſt all theſe difficulties; and as long as we are on the way, permit nothing to take from our hearts the ſolicitude of going right.

Fifth Sunday after Eaſter.

EPISTLE.

St *James* i. 22. Ends verſe 27.

BE *doers of the words, and not hearers only.* A good Chriſtian then, in the firſt place, ought to be a hearer of the word, that is, ought to be ever diligent, willing and ready to be informed or put in mind of his duty, whether by hearing or reading, at all fit opportunities: Becauſe the word of God thus heard or read, is the daily food and nouriſhment of our ſouls; it is what we ſo often pray for in the *Our Father*, when we ſay, *Give us this day our daily bread*; this being a great part of the bread of life, ever neceſſary for the ſupport of our ſpiritual being: Great numbers there are that ſtand in need of it for their inſtruction, as not having yet a ſufficient knowledge of their Chriſtian duties, neceſſary for ſalvation: And as great numbers there are, who knowing their duties, are in want ſtill of being often put in mind of them, that ſo they may practiſe what they know; for

reading and hearing is not always to have ſomething new propoſed to us, but to revive and quicken that knowledge we already have; it is to make us reflect on what we know. For what with converſing with the world, both as to its neceſſities, conveniencies, and vanities, and what with hearkening too much to our own inclinations, our minds are generally ſo taken up with worldly, vain, unprofitable, if not ſinful thoughts, that truly the knowledge we have of God, and our duty, lies generally oppreſſed and ſmothered under heaps of either weighty or empty trifles; and the concern of theſe appears ſo very preſſing and important, that all motives to good are too much hid from our eyes, grow by degrees ſo weak and cold, that, whatever it be in ſpeculation, it is certain in practice, earth is above heaven in our hearts, and the concern of ſalvation gives place to other buſineſs: And thus in time, the world, vanity, or ſin, gains poſſeſſion of our ſouls; if by frequent hearing or reading what is good, we are not daily ſpurred forward to our duty; if thus we revive not the maxims of the goſpel in our hearts, and labour not to keep that ground, which is due to God in our ſouls. Upon which conſideration we are obliged to apply ourſelves often to theſe ex-

erciſes, as we deſire to have an intereſt in God: For, as the ſcripture ſays, *He that is of God, hears the words of God:* So St *Auguſtin* declares, There is no more certain ſign of predeſtination, than willingly to give ear to the word of God. And the reaſon may be; becauſe, as thoſe who live in ſlavery or baniſhment, are ever willing to hear of their own country; and it is eaſy diſcovering of what nation or province every man is, by the ſatisfaction and joy they expreſs in hearing it ſpoken of: So truly thoſe Chriſtians, who find comfort in hearing of heaven, and of the ſafeſt way of going to it, may hence ground ſome hopes, that it is the place they belong to: As thoſe who delight to hear and read nothing, but of the world, its vanities and follies, may likewiſe hence gueſs at the temper of their ſouls, and what place they belong to.

Hence it muſt be concluded a very laudable, if not a neceſſary practice for all chriſtians, who have any ſort of leiſure, to give their ſouls as daily an allowance of this ſpiritual food, as they do of nouriſhment to their bodies; by being conſtant in reading ſome good book every day: As likewiſe for all ſuch as have young people under their care, whether as children, ſcholars, or ſervants, to accuſtom them daily to this exer-

ciſe; but eſpecially on *Sundays* and *holidays*, and in *Lent*, &c. and this in public or common, if it may be: That ſo thoſe violent inclinations, which carry them to levities, vanities, and exceſſive divertiſements, may be thus corrected or moderated, by ſeaſoning their minds with the frequent apprehenſion of more ſubſtantial goods. And where this is neglected through their fault, who have the charge of them, I cannot but think, they offend in a matter of great concern, and may one day find the guilt of it, in all its conſequences, to be more weighty and terrible, than they generally apprehend.

Beſides hearing the word, we muſt be doers alſo: For all hearing and reading being in order to the performing our Chriſtian duties, wherever this is not done, all the reſt are but barren and fruitleſs exerciſes, ſuch as are apt to delude men into a vanity of their own knowledge, and a good opinion of themſelves; but can never recommend them to Almighty God, who requires not only leaves on the trees in his vineyard, but fruit alſo: So that knowledge without practice can be no plea for the leſſening faults, but comes in the end to be an increaſe of damnation. The benefit then of frequent reading muſt be by ſerious reflections on the method and conduct of our

lives, to examine how far we practiſe what we know, and by conſtant endeavours never ceaſe, till, by degrees, we reform in ourſelves what we obſerve contrary to the maxims of Chriſtian diſcipline, of juſtice, and of truth.

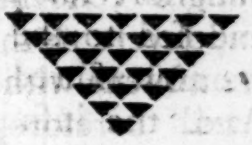
And for the more obvious heads of this examen, the apoſtle ſeems, in the firſt place, to put us upon enquiring how we govern our tongues: For that we are not to pretend either to the truth of religion in our hearts, or practice of it in our lives, if this member be not well regulated. In this point then, we muſt be doers of the word; that is, have a careful watch on ourſelves, and ſuppreſs all thoſe evils which chiefly manifeſt themſelves by the tongue; as, anger, hatred, envy, backbiting, raſh judgments, curſing, ſwearing, lying, and whatever provoking expreſſions are apt to give diſturbance to others; it being impoſſible to conceive the miſchief our words many times cauſe in others, in extinguiſhing charity, and exciting variety of diſordered paſſions. Then to correct that prodigious lightneſs or raſhneſs in advancing falſities, uncertainties, or doubts, for truths; not to aſſert a thing at a venture, for fear of being thought ignorant, which is often very prejudicial; but moſt eſpecially if it be in a matter relating to

conſcience; ſuch deciſions ſerving only to ſettle ſome in a falſe peace, when diſquiet of mind would be much more to their advantage; to put others on very indiſcreet undertakings; and are often followed with variety of evils. Theſe, with the many other diſorders of this member, are to be corrected, ſince they generally proceed from a corruption of the heart; and where this is tolerated, there can be no truth of piety or religion.

Another point recommended by the apoſtle here, is to reflect what our practice is in regard of ſuch as are in any affliction or diſtreſs: For this being a great duty, we cannot pretend to be doers of the word if we are wanting in it. To have no compaſſion for the afflicted, to ſtudy to avoid them, to conſider nothing of relieving them; to be harſh, ſharp, and ſevere to them; is a ſort of cruelty not conſiſtent with the charity of the Goſpel: And, therefore, however diſagreeable to our temper it may be, to converſe with, hear, and aſſiſt them; yet to overcome this uneaſineſs ſeems a neceſſary mortification for all, that they may find a like charity if it ſhould come to be their turn to want it; and not to be confounded with the thoughts of their own hard-heartedneſs, when, in their ſpiritual afflictions, and

last anguish of death, they come to implore God's mercy.

Thus to read and hear the word of God, and practise it in our lives, being our indispensible duties, we are seriously to apply ourselves to both: Help us, O God, in this our obligation: Let no sloth be a hinderance; let not the world and its snares be a diversion to us: Give a taste to our souls, that we may relish and delight in what is good; that so we may chearfully hear and resolutely perform whatever is thy word to us.



Fifth Sunday after Eaſter.

GOSPEL.

John xvi. 23. Ends verſe 30.

WHATEVER *you ſhall aſk the Father in my name, he will give you.* Our bleſſed Redeemer having foretold his apoſtles in this chapter the perſecutions they were to ſuffer in this life, now gives them comfort in the aſſurance of his eternal Father being ready to help them; and that whatever they ſhould aſk in his name, either for the ſupply of their wants, or for the ſupport of their weakneſs, it ſhould be granted them: Great comfort for poor men, who being to be expoſed to the malice of men and devils, were now aſſured of having God on their ſide, and the infinite treaſures of his power and goodneſs to be opened to them upon their demand. This ſame is the comfort of all good Chriſtians, who being to ſtruggle with the infirmities of a corrupt nature, with the wickedneſs of a perverſe world, and the ſubtle importunities of a malicious enemy, have yet the power and goodneſs of God to reſt on, which are en-

gaged in their aſſiſtance by the ſame promiſes that were made to the apoſtles, and upon the ſame conditions of aſking it of the Father in the name of Chriſt.

Here then may Chriſtians ſee, that all their dependence being on God, their principal means of obtaining his aſſiſtance is by prayer; and that if they are ſenſible of their own wants, or ſolicitous for his help, this ſenſe and ſolicitude muſt be manifeſted in their prayers. It is a point of great concern, becauſe of our neceſſary dependence on the divine help; and of great difficulty, becauſe of the infinite diſſipations to which we are ſubject; and therefore to be performed with care, proportioned both to the concern and difficulty of it.

The firſt principal care is to be punctual to the time of prayer. Our wants are daily, and therefore prayer ought to be ſo too; and becauſe the buſineſs and diſtractions of life are many, theſe will often prove a hinderance to prayer, if due care be not uſed to prevent it. Thoſe, therefore, who are engaged in buſineſs, ought to have their hearts fully poſſeſſed with this truth, that their greateſt buſineſs is to obtain the bleſſing of heaven, and that this is neceſſary for them in whatever they undertake; and on this conſideration, are not to think it ſafe to ſet

their hands to any thing, till they have firſt recommended themſelves to God, and begged him to accompany them in all they do. If this cannot be done eaſily, it muſt be done with difficulty; and contrivance muſt be uſed for the performing that which cannot be omitted without a fault. An induſtrious mind, that is in earneſt with its duty, will find ways for ſatisfying it: And it is an argument of ſloth or indifferency, to be eaſy in admitting excuſes. Let thoſe, therefore, who are ſubject to it, but examine themſelves, and they will diſcover it to be the effect of careleſsneſs; and that were they more in earneſt, they would be more exact in this duty. If this omiſſion then be a fault in perſons of buſineſs, what muſt it be in thoſe who have none: But by indulging themſelves in ſleep, ſloth, and the diſorders of an undiſciplined life, cannot find leiſure for prayer, but leave it to hazard; and then are eaſy in perſuading themſelves that they do it when they can? But why do I mention theſe here, as if they were to be inſtructed in the duty of prayer? When perhaps the thing they want, is to be taught to believe in God, and that there is an eternity to come: For theſe can be no more than imaginary truths to them, who feel no more weight of them upon their ſpirits than if they were dreams.

As to neglect the time of prayer is a fault, ſo it is another like it, to make delays in going to it, and to be ever the laſt that appears when all are ſummoned to meet in public. This may be the caſe of the beſt ſometimes; but wherever it is cuſtomary in any, ſet a mark upon thoſe perſons, for there is ſomething wanting at the bottom; either they know not themſelves, or their dependence on God, who then think they gain when they ſteal from him, and from the help they ought to give to their own ſouls.

If this be reprovable, ſo it is likewiſe to pray in an indecent manner: For though God regards the heart, and excepts againſt no poſture, when Chriſtians do ſincerely what they can, and are diſabled by infirmity: Yet when it is the effect of ſloth or indifferency, there is ſo much of irreverence in it, that I think all thoſe who have a ſenſe of God's preſence, or a deſire of obtaining what they aſk, will be careful not to bring this *caveat* with them againſt their own petitions. Where there is the true ſpirit of penance, or a zeal for God's honour, there will be no allowance without neceſſity for this nice and clowniſh worſhip.

It is another fault in Chriſtians, to run over their prayers in ſuch haſte, that there

is nothing but hurry and confuſion, and no decency in what they do. Holy actions ought to be performed in a holy manner, ſuch as ſpeaks both a ſenſe of our own unworthineſs, and of his infinite ſanctity and majeſty, to whom we make our addreſs, or before whom we adore; even ſo as to reſemble, in the beſt manner we can, the choirs of bleſſed ſpirits above, in the homage they pay to him that ſits on the throne. And what is there of this in that recital of prayers, where there is nothing but a ſacrilegious clipping, or a confuſed jumble of words; where Chriſtians ſpeak to God in ſuch a manner, as they could not do the like to a footman without bluſhing; where, by ſhewing themſelves in haſte to be gone, they affront God to his face, while they pretend to aſk bleſſings of him? And how then muſt this look at the altar in thoſe who perform the moſt ſacred functions, and ought to give example to others of all holineſs; and yet are ſo precipitate in what they ſay and do themſelves, and ſo indecently aſſiſted by ſuch as mumble here and there a word, and ſtumble over all the reſt; that undertaking to celebrate the higheſt myſteries, and even in the perſon of Chriſt, they ſeem to do all without the leaſt ſign of Chriſt's Spirit in them. Deliver, O God,

thy altar from ſuch ſcandals, and ſecure me by thy grace from ever having any part in them.

There is ſtill another general fault in this exerciſe, and that is, to pray without attention, and in ſuch a negligent manner, that what is pretended as prayer, becomes nothing leſs than ſin. It is not, however, expected, that prayer, in this mortal ſtate, can be performed without diſtractions; nature is too weak, and the devil too buſy for this; but ſtill the heart may be ſo watchful, as, upon the firſt obſerving, to repel whatever thoughts are unſuitable for that time; they who uſe this violence with themſelves, may have confidence that God will pardon whatever diſtractions are the effect, not of contempt or negligence, but of infirmity only; for he knows our weakneſs, and will ſhew mercy.

But while Chriſtians make propoſals of ſtanding againſt diſtractions, they muſt remember this is not to be the work of prayer-time only, but rather of the whole life; for if the ſoul be not in a kind of quiet, how ſhould it pray quietly? Hence their great intereſt is to gain a compoſure of mind, by moderating all kind of paſſions, by leſſening their deſires, by abating all manner of ſolicitude, by ſtudying to do all with fidelity;

but not to be anxious about the ſucceſs, nor in what the world ſhall ſay; they who can gain this point, of reſting in the will of God, are in the beſt diſpoſition of prayer: But where the ſoul is open to all manner of diſtractions, there can be no more hopes of quiet prayer than in the midſt of a rabble.

Theſe directions may be ſome helps for praying in the name of Chriſt: Teach us, O God, to perform this duty; for ſince all our help and ſecurity, in this our ſtate of weakneſs and danger, is from thy grace, we muſt certainly be miſerable if we learn not to aſk it as we ought.

Monday in Rogation Week.

EPISTLE.

St. *James* v. 16. Ends verſe 20.

THE *fervent prayer of the juſt prevails much.* To comply with the deſign of the church, we ought to meet in public on theſe days, and there offer up our prayers to Almighty God, to obtain his bleſſings on the fruits of the earth, to preſerve us from all peſtilential diſtempers, and in the true ſpirit of humiliation and penance, endeavour to prepare us for the approaching ſolemnity of the Aſcenſion. We are ever in want of the divine bleſſings, which are all to come to us from the hand of God; and it being his will not to diſpenſe them to us, but on the condition of our manifeſting our moſt earneſt deſires to him by prayer, we are therefore, as we have a concern for our own intereſt, to be ever ſolicitous in praying to him. Now to pray as we ought, our firſt endeavours ought to be, by a ſincere repentance and hearty contrition, to remove from our ſouls whatever is there of ſin, and we may

apprehend to be an obſtacle to the divine goodneſs, and juſt motive of denying what we aſk: For it is *the prayer of the juſt prevails much;* and *ſinners he hears not.* Hence we may gueſs at ſome reaſon of our praying in vain; becauſe we uſe a form of words, which being accompanied with only weak deſires of a ſinful heart, can never prevail on heaven to pour forth its bleſſings on us. Secondly, We muſt beg of God to teach us how to pray: And this we ought to aſk all our lives; becauſe we have many ſeeming neceſſities and falſe wants, which ought not to be the ſubject of our prayers; we cannot tell what chiefly we are to demand, on what we are to build our aſſurance, or with what diſpoſitions we are to make them. We truly are ignorant what is good for ourſelves, and therefore there are but few things we can deſire in particular; and however importunate we may be, according to the apprehenſions of nature; yet this ought ever to be accompanied with this unalterable reſolution of ſubmitting to whatever Almighty God knows beſt for us, and wholly ſurrendering ourſelves to his conduct. Thirdly, We ought to pray with perſeverance: That as the bleſſings of God are infinitely valuable, ſo we may expreſs the value we have for them by our fervent

deſires, and not being tired in our prayers. Nothing ſtops the divine bounty ſo much as the indifferency we have for his graces: And where does this more evidently appear than in our impatience and want of perſeverance in praying; ſince we muſt either believe his bleſſings are not worth ſo much ſoliciting, which is a contempt; or elſe, that God is not merciful enough to grant our requeſt, which is a degree of infidelity? He that prays then, ought to begin with a reſolution of never being tired; and he will ſoon diſcover the good effect of his praying: He will perceive it a great bleſſing to live ever with this dependence on God; and that it is no ſmall mercy to obtain a perſeverance in this humble ſtate of praying and begging, which ought to be the condition of all men during this life. He then, that is ever ſenſible of his own poverty and miſery, ſo as daily to aſk for relief, muſt not complain of not obtaining what he aſks, ſince in this he has obtained a great deal.

He muſt leave it to God either to refuſe or delay what he aſks; ſince all this in him may be for our greater good, to raiſe us to a more fervent devotion, to make us pray with more ſubmiſſion and perſeverance. He is ever calling upon us to correct our tepidity and coldneſs, to ſubmit to his

orders, to humble ourſelves under his powerful hand, and perſevere in prayer. Now the denials or delays he makes to our requeſts may be very advantageous to this end, if we uſe them as we ought; not raſhly pretending to divine what are the intentions of God, but ſincerely examining if there be any thing in us that may juſtly prevent the effect of our prayers. If we can diſcover nothing, we may then compoſe our minds with the thoughts, That it is likely a ſpiritual proſperity might be hurtful to us, that we are not capable to bear it: That God entruſts not his gifts to us, becauſe he ſees us diſpoſed to abuſe them. He knows our weakneſſes, and we know them not; he ſees our darkneſs, and we ſee it not. What can we then do better than wholly ſurrender ourſelves to his diſpoſal, and regulate our ſelves by the declaration he has made in his will, in requiring us to pray always, and not to be diſcouraged? This is the way he has ſhewn us, and there is no queſtion but the going on in this way with reſolution and patience, will lead to life everlaſting.

And though our fears may ſuggeſt to us, that our prayers are without ſucceſs, becauſe of the daily imperfections to which we are ſubject, and from which we often deſire to be delivered; yet, in reality, this is no evidence,

evidence; but rather a temptation of the enemy to diſcourage us from our devotion. For may it not be the effect of our prayers, that we are exempt from many crimes which others commit? May it not be beneficial to us, to be preſerved in a ſtate of humility? May not our pride ſtand in need of ſuch a counterpoiſe? Who knows, but if we ſaw nothing but virtue in us, we might be dangerouſly carried away with pride and preſumption, which are ſins moſt deteſtable to God? Wherefore I cannot but think, there are ſome perſons whom God hears, in ſeeming not to hear them; for though they are not heard as to their particular imperfections, againſt which they pray; yet he hears them in keeping them humble, which is truly the foundation of a chriſtian life, and ought to be the principal end of their prayers. Our buſineſs is to be ever conſtant in our prayers, ſtill endeavouring to correct all our defects; but we are to leave to Almighty God the manner in which he will pleaſe to hear us, whether it be in remedying our failings, or humbling us by them.

And though it may ſeem inconſiſtent, to have patience with our own weakneſſes, and at the ſame time ſincerely endeavour

to amend them; ſince we cannot quietly ſuffer what we hate; yet truly it is not ſo; there being no greater hinderance to our amendment, than our impatience under the evils we deſire to amend. He that holds out with patience, is more maſter of himſelf; is truly humble at the ſight of his own weakneſs, and being thus compoſed, labours with greater application, and prays with more fervour: Whilſt he that anxiouſly diſquiets himſelf at his relapſes; has pride for the ground of his diſquiet; as generally thinking he has ſtrength enough to hold out under ſuch trials; and by his interior diſturbance, is rendered uncapable of truly watching over himſelf, and taking that pains neceſſary for his recovery. For his whole thoughts being taken up in the conſideration of his own paſt faults, he gives no attention to his preſent circumſtances, and thus ever looking back, he is hindered from going forward, and making any advance in virtue. Grant me, O God, the true ſpirit of prayer; grant me attention, fervour and perſeverance; let no thoughts of my own failings, nor indiſcreet fears ever diſcourage me from this duty; but hear me in what manner thou wilt; for I reſolve to pray always.

Aſcenſion Day.

LESSON.

Acts i. 1. Ends verſe 11.

HE was taken up into heaven. It was forty days after his reſurrection, Chriſt aſcended into heaven: Taking this time, by his frequent apparitions to confirm his Apoſtles in the belief of his reſurrection, and give them inſtructions for the well-performing that great charge he had recommended to them, of preaching his goſpel. For this end he delayed his entrance into heaven till this day, and put off, as it were, his taking poſſeſſion of bliſs. Strange violence to his ſtate of glory, for our good! But a good leſſon to all thoſe who have the care of ſouls, to encourage them to renounce all private conveniences and intereſt, for the benefit of their flock; and not only to appear to them, but to labour in directing, comforting, and inſtructing them; and inſtructing them too, as he did his Apoſtles, as here expreſſed, *ver.* 2. that is, by the *Holy Ghoſt.*

For if the Son of God teaches not, but by the Holy Spirit, muſt it not be a great preſumption for men to teach their own private thoughts? The doctrine of paſtors, ought to be a doctrine of ſalvation; and whence can this come but from that fountain of life, the Spirit of God? Where there is no aſſurance of this Holy Spirit reſiding or aſſiſting, there can be no aſſurance of truth or ſalvation from ſuch teachers; whilſt all private ſentiments are only from the ſpirit of man; and the more poſitively they are urged, they have ſo much more, not of God, but of pride, to ſupport them. It is the Spirit of God unites divided people into one faith; but the ſpirit of man divides people, otherwiſe united, into many faiths: And whatever diviſion there is in the world, it generally ariſes from this root; eſpecially where natural abilities and learning raiſing men to a good opinion of themſelves, give them confidence of aſſerting their own private thoughts for certainties and infallible truths.

It is this preſumption of human ſpirit that is confounded in this laſt inſtruction given perſonally by Chriſt to men: Where firſt the Apoſtles enquiring of Chriſt, *If at that time the kingdom of* Iſrael *ſhould be re-*

ſtored, plainly demonſtrates, there can be no knowledge or certainty of things belonging to God, but what comes from God: It cannot be imagined, but they had reaſons enough (according to the common way) to reſolve within their own thoughts, what they aſked of him; but they had humility enough to diſtruſt their own reaſoning, in a point ſo much above them; and to advance nothing for truth, but what was delivered to them by that truth, which could not err: And ſince he was not pleaſed to reveal it, therefore you hear no more of their pretending to the knowledge of it. Happy the Apoſtles, who, in in their teaching are directed by ſuch a maſter, and who conclude, they know no farther, than they know from him.

Then Chriſt's anſwer confirms the ſame; *It is not for you to know the times or ſeaſons, which the Father has reſerved in his own power.* The knowledge of the Apoſtles is reſtrained to thoſe particulars, which God reveals to them; and how then, in divine matters, can the knowledge of other men go beyond this? It cannot; and therefore, however undiſcerning men may be prevailed on to aſſent to points thus unauthentically delivered, and call it *Faith* or *Believing;* yet certainly it can be no more

than an *opinion* or *perſuaſion*, a *human faith*, and not *divine*; ſince it is not a truth revealed by the Father; but ſet up for ſuch by the preſumption of men: And though the adheſion to it, be with an aſſurance, even like divine; yet ſince it is not founded on ſufficient motives, it is in reality nothing better than raſhneſs, obſtinacy, or poſitiveneſs.

Thus ought the aſſurance, as to the truth of things above us, be confined to the revelation of the ſpirit of God; and this being above all other ſecurity, leaves no place for doubt; but brings reſt with it to every ſoul that receives it. There may be many other things however, which curioſity may put men upon enquiring after; and which give great diſquiet and uneaſineſs to ſuch as are ſolicitous in this ſearch. But all this is unreaſonable; becauſe all thoſe things, which God has been pleaſed not to manifeſt to man, man ſhould be pleaſed in having them hid from him. For the ſpirit of a chriſtian, is the ſpirit of a profound humility under the power of God. It is content with the knowledge of its duty, and with the aſſurance of thoſe truths which God has revealed; but it is far from ſearching into the counſels of the Almighty, or unprofitably enquiring into

what he has no need to know. A chriſtian's duty is to obey, and this is the ſubject of his ſtudy. He makes a general preparation to ſubmit to all the divine orders without exception: And the leſs he knows, the more general is his preparation, and his ſubmiſſion the more perfect. He knows the ſpirit of curioſity, and the ſolicitude of a ſeeking temper, is a very great obſtacle to a chriſtian life; for while the ſoul ſpends itſelf in eager enquiries, it gives the leſs attention to the exact diſcharge of its duties: It is very narrow; and cannot attend to variety of objects: and therefore ignorance of ſuch things, as we are not to know, is no reflection or diſadvantage at all.

This was part of the reproof given this day to the Apoſtles; *Why ſtand you gazing up to heaven?* They were earneſtly looking after their maſter, and being reprehended for it, as an unprofitable action, they are directed to the practice of their duty, and commanded to prepare for his ſecond coming, as Judge. All enquiring into the counſels of God, is ſtanding to gaze up to heaven; it is truly to be at a ſtand; it is to ſpend thoſe endeavours in uſeleſs and uncertain ſpeculation, which ought to be employed in practical duties,

and ſeriouſly preparing for the laſt account. We have all a great taſk on our hands, as to this particular: And while we contemplate this day our Redeemer aſcending; if we did but reflect, how indiſpoſed we are to follow him in that way to bliſs; how much we have of earth, corruption, ſelf-love, ſloth, ſenſuality and the world to overcome, before we can be in any tolerable degree prepared for that journey; we ſhould ſoon perceive, our buſineſs here, ought not to be gazing up to heaven in needleſs enquiries, but ſetting our hands to the work, in conſtant endeavours to maſter ourſelves, and advance in all thoſe great duties Almighty God requires from us.

Bleſſed therefore be thy Holy Name, O Jeſus, who providing us a church, aſſiſted by the holy ſpirit, to direct us in all ſaving truths, without danger of erring, haſt thus wiſely cut off all occaſion of curious and uſeleſs enquiries, and delivered us from the uneaſineſs of being ever ſeeking: Grant we may ſo make uſe of this bleſſing, that reſting ſecurely on the promiſe of thy ſpirit, we may employ our whole endeavours in no other ſeeking, than in ſeeking to love and ſerve thee: And thus may we hope one day to follow thee, and partake, though unworthy, of thy glory.

Aſcenſion Day.

GOSPEL.

Mark. xvi. 14. to the End.

JESUS was taken up into heaven, and ſits at the right hand of God. On this day of the Aſcenſion, all chriſtians ought to join with the choirs above, in their joy for Chriſt's triumphs on earth being now conſummated in heaven, at the right hand of his Father. This place was due to his victories over ſin and death, and thanks are due from us, for that he has made both his ſufferings and triumphs our intereſt, in dying for our redemption, and now aſcending for our glorification. Let us therefore now celebrate this feſtival, not in ceremony only, but ſo, that God may be honoured, and we advantaged by it.

And to begin well, let us join ourſelves in ſpirit with the Apoſtles on Mount *Olivet;* and as Chriſt was pleaſed before his aſcenſion, to lift up his hands, and give his bleſſing to them, *Elevatis manibus benedixit eis;* ſo let us beg a part in the bleſſing

of the day. His adorable hands lifted up, ſtretched forth, pierced and faſtened to the croſs, as hands of malediction, are for this become the fountain of all bleſſings upon earth, and of all graces upon his church. Lift up now, bleſſed Jeſus, thoſe divine hands, and ſtretch them over us, for on their power and mercy depends our eternal lot; pour forth thoſe bleſſings upon us, which may ſeparate our hearts from the earth, and unite us to thee.

This ought to be one principal fruit of this preſent ſolemnity: For ſince Chriſt aſcended, to prepare for us ſeats of bliſs; we can no otherwiſe hope to come to the poſſeſſion of them, but by raiſing our hearts above the earth, and deſiring to be united with God. And is this the diſpoſition now required? How miſerable then am I, who have my heart linked to earth with ſo many chains, that I can no ſooner lift it up towards heaven, but I am preſently drawn back, as if I were going out of my way? How then am I to expect a place above, when all that is within me, preſſes me down to the earth; and I cannot ſay, I deſire to leave it, but I muſt ſuſpect it of formality, and doubt the truth of the profeſſion?

Here then, while Chriſt's aſcenſion is

the ſubject of a common joy, in me it is the occaſion of tears, ſince heaven opening to receive him, ſhews me what ought to be the diſpoſition of my ſoul; and likewiſe how unlike I am to what I ought to be. What therefore can I do, but proſtrate myſelf before thee, O Jeſus, and again beg thy bleſſing? Lift up then now in heaven thy hands of power and mercy, and ſeparate my heart from the love of the world; give me a new ſpirit, even ſuch a ſpirit, by which I may thirſt after thee, and labour all my life to overcome that corruption, which has hitherto been my misfortune, in unhappily faſtening me to the earth, and making me earneſt in ſeeking what I ought to deſpiſe.

This muſt be the preparation of all thoſe, who think in earneſt of following their redeemer; they muſt conſider the place which has received him, and what are the conditions of it. Can vice have there admittance? Is there place for ſenſuality, intemperance, covetouſneſs, injuſtice, frauds, oppreſſion, malice, uncharitableneſs, revenge? Can ambition enter there? Or pride, vanity or ſelf-love? Will it receive thoſe who have their ſouls wholly diſſipated with the follies of this world, or thoſe who ſtudy nothing here, but how to pleaſe themſelves

in all that a ſlothful and idle humour can ſuggeſt? If nothing of this can be admitted into heaven, ought it not to be the buſineſs of every one, to labour in diſengaging themſelves from theſe evils, which otherwiſe will ſhut heaven againſt them? For how can their ſouls, at death, be fit for heaven, which here live on in ſuch diſorders as are inconſiſtent with it?

Whoever therefore thinks ſeriouſly of aſcending with Chriſt to heaven, muſt every day learn to aſcend; and as all find the way long and difficult, ſo they muſt every day take ſome ſteps, that ſo at length they may happily finiſh their journey. They muſt then aſcend ſomething every day. If the love of riches faſtens them to the earth, they muſt work their hearts, by degrees, into that indifferency, as to diſengage them from this clog. If pride or ambition keeps down their ſouls, they muſt look into the emptineſs of all they admire, and learn, with contempt, to ſet their feet upon all that, to which now they are ſlaves. If the follies of idleneſs, company and divertiſement, confine their happineſs to earth, they muſt ſet the concern of their eternal ſtate againſt them, and thus get above the power of theſe charms. If ſloth ties their feet, or coldneſs puts a damp on

their ſpirits, they muſt give a ſeaſonable look into hell, and let that fire looſe their bonds; and thawing their frozen hearts, quicken them with ſome vigorous heat. If worldly ſolicitude or trouble oppreſſes their mind, they muſt ſtudy the goſpel, and by learning to undervalue, what now ſeems ſo weighty, gain new liberty to their ſouls.

In this manner, if all look into themſelves; and obſerving, what part of the earth it is, that lies upon them; what paſſion it is that makes their heart captive to this world; then uſing ſincere endeavours for recovering their freedom; there will be thus laid a foundation of a well grounded hope, that one day they ſhall be raiſed above the earth, and admitted to the participation of that happineſs, into which Chriſt entered this day. A happineſs, by which they ſhall be made part of that kingdom, where God only reigns; and which is not to be obtained, but by thoſe, who here labour to bring themſelves into ſubjection to God, and begin that kingdom here, which they deſire to be conſummated in heaven.

Where this method is not taken, I cannot think ſuch chriſtians have any concern in this feſtival, or any reaſon to hope for that joy, to which it calls our juſt thoughts.

For ſince a ſtate of ſin, without juſt deſires and endeavours for amendment, is a ſtate reſembling that of the devils, it cannot be a preparation for heaven, but for hell, and to that place are ſuch ſinners, every day deſcending: what then have they to do with the aſcenſion of our Lord? And as for thoſe, who though not in the depth of ſin, yet live careleſs of eternity, having their hearts crampt with ſloth, or bent on every thing but God; how little a part have they? For may not theſe walls have as much right to heaven, as theſe, who think little more of it, than theſe inſenſible creatures; who ſtand as unmoved, in regard of heaven, as they, and only abuſe whatever advantages they have above them, to the ſeeking themſelves? If ſelf-love and eaſe have the promiſes of bliſs, theſe may join in their hopes; but ſuch promiſes are not recorded in our goſpel.

Thoſe only then are here to raiſe their hopes, who, honouring Chriſt aſcending, accompany him in their deſires, think themſelves unhappy in their pilgrimage, and in the many hazards of the way yet to come; who conſider what their hazards and hinderances are, and by earneſt, and even untired endeavours for removing them, give proof, that their diſtance from God

is not voluntary, but only their misfortune. Where there are theſe deſires and endeavours, there are ſo many ſteps towards heaven, and ſuch chriſtians aſcend daily towards God. Give us, O Jeſus, a true ſpirit, by which we may raiſe ourſelves above the earth: And, ſince thou knoweſt our weakneſs, let thy grace be proportioned to it, that we may no longer lie buried under the earth, but on this day of thy aſcenſion, begin now to aſcend in deſires with thee, and go on ſtill aſcending, till we come to the joys of thy preſence.

Sunday within the Octave of the Aſcenſion.

EPISTLE.

1 *Peter* iv. 7. Ends verſe 11.

THAT God may be honoured in all things, through Chriſt Jeſus. The end for which man was created, was, that God might be honoured by him: If then we ſo live, that we are ever ſolicitous to honour God in what we do, we anſwer the end of our being; and may hope at our departure hence, to hear that happy welcome; *Well done, good and faithful ſervant;* as having been juſt and faithful to all thoſe purpoſes, for which we received our being. But if we live on in a conſtant ſolicitude of accompliſhing our own private deſigns, relating to this world, but under a general careleſſneſs of referring what we do to God, and a neglect of his honour; is it not to be feared, that, as in this we wholly deviate from that end for which we came into this world, ſo, in going out of it, we ſhall miſs that poſſeſſion of our laſt end, which

is to be obtained by no other way, than *honouring God in all things, through Jeſus Chriſt?* The caſe is very evident, that as God is in himſelf the firſt and univerſal mover; ſo he ought to be in us the firſt mover of all we do; that is to ſay, we ought to do nothing, but becauſe it is his will we ſhould do it; and thus we make him the beginning of all our actions: and becauſe he is and ought to be our laſt end; therefore it is our obligation, to refer always to his honour, what we begin in his name; thus he will be to us, *Alpha* and *Omega*, our beginning and end; and thus he will be honoured in all things, through Chriſt Jeſus.

According to this rule, we ought to act nothing, but as commiſſioned from God, by his order and authority, and for the intereſt of his name: And in this, chriſtians are particularly to diſtinguiſh themſelves from infidels, and thoſe that know not God. So that, while theſe proceed in all they do, by private motives of intereſt, ſenſe, or ſelf-love, they eat and drink to pleaſe themſelves; they follow company and diverſion to gratify their inclination; they are induſtrious to their calling, to encreaſe their ſtock, in compliance with their own covetous deſires; they take many li-

berties to ſatisfy their ſenſes; and thus commonly are directed by no other motives than of convenience, ſenſuality and ſelf-love: A chriſtian ought to take the riſe of all his actions ſome degrees higher, and ever begin from God; ſo that in many things, doing the very ſame a heathen does, yet doing them, not principally like him, to ſatisfy himſelf, but becauſe God has been pleaſed to require it of him; hence all ſuch his actions become chriſtian and divine; whilſt the others, having no other beginning or end of what they do, but themſelves, in this proceed not as belonging to God, and their actions are not chriſtian, but only natural. It was certainly this thought *David* had in his mind when he cried out: *Oculi mei ſemper ad Dominum, My eyes are always upon our Lord*; as having God always in his ſight; and deſiring to begin all things in his name, and end all to his honour.

By this method, a chriſtian has every moment an opportunity in his hands, of acting like a chriſtian, in ſerving and honouring God; ſince it is not only thoſe more ſelect actions of praying, faſts, and alms, of viſiting the ſick, inſtructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, and ſuch like, that may be thus begun and

ended; but every particular action performed the whole day, in relation even to the meaneſt offices, whether in the ſhop, the kitchen, the ſtreet, the field, the priſon, or the galley; all may be done in his name, and offered to his honour; and thus may become a ſacrifice of juſtice to him, as being performed to ſatisfy that duty, which belongs to every one in their reſpective profeſſions. As therefore at the end of every pſalm we ſay a *Gloria Patri*: So, if at the end of every ordinary action, we concluded with the like hymn of praiſe, I queſtion not but it would be an acceptable oblation to him, who rewards not only thoſe who offer their treaſures, but alſo thoſe, who bring their mites. It is by this method, ſuch as through ignorance, cannot read; ſuch as, by a perpetual toil and ſlavery, cannot have leiſure to pray; and ſuch as, through pain or ſickneſs, cannot apply their thoughts to any regular devotion, may ſtill be in a good way of ſaving their ſouls, by making all they do and ſuffer, a ſacrifice of praiſe, by conſecrating all to God, by beginning every thing, becauſe it is his will; and offering all to him, becauſe all belongs to him. Thus in every action there is fidelity and juſtice, and he that does ſo, is faithful and juſt.

Nay, I think, according to St. *Paul*'s rule, *Rom.* viii. 18. this is the moſt aſſured means of diſcovering, whether we are truly the children of God: For if the *ſpirit be to give teſtimony to us* of this, we are to examine what ſpirit it is, that moves us in all we do; and if we find there the ſpirit of God referring and ordering all to his holy will and his glory, truly upon this teſtimony we may lay a well-grounded hope, that we belong to him: For then that Spirit is the life of our actions, by which they are all animated, and that life is of God. This concluſion may receive ſome evidence from the ſpirit of the world: For as when men act upon no other motive than of the world, ſenſuality, and the fleſh, it is plain their actions are worldly, ſenſual, or carnal; ſuch are their thoughts, their words, and the endeavours they uſe; and the ſpirit bears teſtimony to them of it; becauſe the ſpirit that moves them is ſuch: So that whatever it be they undertake, whether as to ſtate of life, in church and ſtate; whether as to actions ſeemingly religious, pious, or charitable, they are nothing but worldly, inaſmuch as it is not the conſideration of God's honour determines them to action, but only the thought of their own intereſt, convenience, or ſatisfaction. And

thus, as this takes off from the value of the moſt religious duties, nay, ſo perverts their very nature, as to render them unprofitable, if not ſinful; ſo there is no action of itſelf ſo inconſiderable, but if undertaken in the ſpirit of God, and performed to his honour, upon this is ſanctified, is truly chriſtian, and available to the obtaining eternal happineſs.

And this being a thing ſo very eaſy, eſpecially in thoſe whoſe lives are regular; methinks it is pity ſo many actions ſhould be loſt for want of this, which, with this, God is ready to accept of and enter into the book of life. There are many, I hope, who live ſo ſeemingly pious and innocent, that the greateſt part of what they do, is capable of being thus ſanctified; and yet for want of this care and good management, do ſo much out of cuſtom, ſo much upon principles of nature, ſo much in compliance for a good name, and other private reſpects, that when the account is made up, I fear they will come very ſhort of what they expect. *Cogitavi vias meas.* We are then to think of what we do, and for whom we do it; we are ever to act upon a motive of duty or compliance with the will of God, that ſo, after a regular life, we may not only find, that we have been naturally or mo-

rally good, that is, good philoſophers, but good upon better principles, that is, good chriſtians. And what more compendious way for this, than honouring God in all things, through Jeſus Chriſt.

Sunday within the Octave of the Aſcenſion.

GOSPEL.

John xv. 26. Ends xvi. 4.

HE (the comforter) *ſhall give teſtimony of me; and you ſhall give teſtimony of me.* This is part of the diſcourſe Chriſt made to his Apoſtles after his laſt ſupper, wherein he promiſed the Holy Ghoſt ſhould come upon them; and comforts the faithful of all ages, in ſhewing them the ſure foundation of their faith; *to wit*, that all the truths of faith ſhould be authorized by the double evidence of two witneſſes; the one external, which is that of the Apoſtles; the other internal, which is that of the Holy Ghoſt. He was not pleaſed, that the ordinary way of receiving his faith ſhould be by inſpiration only of the holy ſpirit, but has joined it with the teſtimony of the Apoſtles, whence there is no truth belongs to faith, but what was taught by the Apoſtles, either by writing or preaching; and is conveyed

down to all ages by the holy ſcriptures, or tradition of the church, which has the Holy Ghoſt to watch over it, and be its ſecurity in what it delivers.

This appointment of the divine wiſdom, is that which preſerves the faith of chriſtians from all illuſion: For to how much of this would it be expoſed, were the pretext of inſpiration enough for any doctrine to be received as an article of faith? Would not then every one advance his own thoughts, as inſpired from above, without any poſſibility of diſtinguiſhing who is in the right, and who is in the wrong? Wherefore Jeſus Chriſt would not leave his doctrine to this method of uncertainty and confuſion, but requires the concurring teſtimonies of his holy ſpirit, and the Apoſtles; and in this condemns all their preſumption, who, not regarding what has been delivered from the Apoſtles, ſet up their own private ſentiments, as the dictates of the Holy Ghoſt.

But the Apoſtles did not give teſtimony of Chriſt by their doctrine only, but by their lives and deaths, in preaching his goſpel, by their example, and ſealing the truth of it with their blood. Thus all paſtors ought to bear witneſs of Chriſt, firſt, by preaching him. Secondly, by living

living ſo, that Chriſt be manifeſted in them. Thirdly, by being in a preparation of giving their lives for him. In theſe three ways they are to be witneſſes of Chriſt: To be ſilent then, when they have liberty of ſpeaking, is ſuppreſſing their evidence; and ſo to take part with the world, as to encourage it in its admired follies and extravagancies; what is this, but forſaking the cauſe of Chriſt; ſuch as would be eſteemed treachery in courts of judicature, and, I fear, will be ſo judged at Chriſt's tribunal? And are theſe prepared to give their lives for Chriſt? O God, how will they die for thy goſpel, who do not live by thy goſpel?

If paſtors are to give teſtimony of Chriſt, the flock muſt not think themſelves exempt from this common duty. All that believe in Chriſt, muſt bear witneſs of him, the members muſt live by the ſame ſpirit with the Head. Thus St. *Paul* writing to the faithful, deſires that Chriſt may be manifeſted and formed in them, that they would walk, even as Chriſt walked. This is bearing witneſs of Chriſt, this is propagating his goſpel, this is giving evidence of his Spirit, this is confounding their diſorders, who live according to the fleſh and the world. In this manner

then, all are bound to be witneſſes of Chriſt, but ſome in a more particular manner, as parents in regard of their children, maſters in regard of their ſervants, *&c.* becauſe theſe acting by a particular deputation from Chriſt, and as his vicegerents; and thoſe under their care being enjoined to honour Chriſt in them; they muſt look on themſelves as his repreſentatives, and therefore ought ſo to live by his ſpirit, that it may be communicated to thoſe in their charge, and his doctrine be confirmed in them by their example.

Where there is not this particular tie, there is however ſtill this obligation upon them, ariſing from the connexion they are bound to have with Chriſt their head, and with the faithful, as their fellow-members; upon which conſideration, all chriſtians are to do every thing to the edification of their neighbour; *Omnia ad edificationem fiant:* They are to do good, not only before God, but alſo before men; they are to abſtain from the appearance of evil; their moderation is to be known to all men; but this, not upon any motive of gaining eſteem with the world, but that God may be glorified, and their neighbour enlightened and ſpurred on to good, by their example; that ſo it may be verified

of all, what the Apoſtle, ſaid of the *Corinthians*; *Veſtra æmulatio provocavit plurimos*; your good example has encouraged many: And of the *Theſſalonians*, *Facti eſtis forma*, you are become a *pattern* to all that have received the faith in *Macedonia*. Thus were thoſe primitive chriſtians witneſſes of Chriſt; and their commendation ſhews, in what manner all others ought to bear teſtimony of him.

But this obligation is ſtill more extended in regard of thoſe, who, being yet in darkneſs are enemies to the truth; that good example may help to the removing their ill impreſſions, and bringing them to the light. Upon which motive St. *Paul* commanded the *Theſſalonians*, *Præcipimus vobis*, to walk with great uprightneſs towards thoſe, who are out of the church; and the *Philippians*, to live without reproof, and as the children of God, in the midſt of a wicked and perverſe nation, and to be as ſo many lights to them: And St. *Peter* adviſing all chriſtians, that their converſation be good amongſt unbelievers, gives the reaſon; "That "whereas, ſays he, they ſpeak evil of "you, as workers of iniquity, conſidering "you by your good works, they may "glorify God in the day of their viſitation.

Upon theſe conſiderations, all that profeſs the faith of Chriſt, ought to be witneſſes of Chriſt; and the obligation is ſo preſſing, that whoever does otherwiſe, muſt be very criminal in the ſight of God. The reaſon is, becauſe none can be remarkably evil, but beſides their ſin againſt God, they muſt neceſſarily give offence to ſome, give encouragement to others to tranſgreſs, and unavoidably bring a ſcandal upon the church, in giving occaſion to deluded ſouls of meaſuring its doctrine by their iniquity, and to its profeſſed enemies of blaſpheming it. Theſe are evils enough to terrify any thinking ſoul, and keep it under a ſtrict reſtraint: Since drawing others into ſin, is acting the devil's part, in the ruin of ſouls: Giving offence to the weak, has many woes pronounced againſt it, ſuch as render his unhappineſs more preferable; who, with a mill-ſtone about his neck, is thrown into the ſea. And as for bringing a ſcandal on the church, let thoſe meaſure the guilt of it that can: For if their number be conſidered, who (being rendered averſe to the ways of truth, by the extravagancies of its profeſſors) never more can be perſuaded to look there for it, where it is to be found; the blindneſs and miſcarriage of

ſo many ſouls will be a confuſion too great, for thoſe who have given the occaſion, to ſtand under it without deſpair. And if it were well conſidered, how much, beſides notorious crimes, even ordinary paſſion, raſh oaths, looſeneſs of behaviour or diſcourſe, lay the grounds of, or ſtrengthen ſuch an averſion, whilſt, with too many, all this is thrown upon the church, I believe it would oblige all to obſerve a much greater ſtrictneſs, than they do, that ſo they may not bring the guilt of others ſouls upon their heads; nor be reproached as unnatural children, in confirming thoſe who are in rebellion againſt their mother. O God, and how much is there of this amongſt thoſe, who ſay, they belong to thee? By whom is truth more injured, than by its own profeſſors? Remedy, we beſeech thee, this evil; and ſince all of us are called to be witneſſes of Chriſt, grant we may ſatisfy this general duty, and that neither paſtors nor people may betray his cauſe, either by vice, raſhneſs, or indiſcretion.

Whit-Sunday.

LESSON.

Acts ii. 1. Ends verſe 11.

THEY were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt. The Apoſtles received not this Holy Spirit, but after a great preparation of prayer and union in chriſtian charity. Thoſe chriſtians who now expect a bleſſing from the aſſiſtance of this Holy Spirit, if they have not already thus prepared their ſouls, ought now diligently to apply themſelves to theſe holy exerciſes, that ſo they may not paſs over this great ſolemnity, without the advantage the church deſigns for them. For it is not to be expected this divine fire ſhould enter into a heart, which through neglect is yet chill and cold, and not at all warmed with the fervour of prayer: If it be wholly worldly, and not raiſed above the earth, how ſhall heaven come and take its abode in it? And if there be any roots of diviſion or uncharitableneſs, by which the heart is exaſperated, or at leaſt, ſeparated from any neighbour, how can the Holy Ghoſt

find admittance there, who is the God of charity, of union and peace? This cannot be; therefore the heart is to be prepared; and according to the ordinary method, God requiring a kind of proportion between the preparation and the graces, for which we prepare; hence the gift of the Holy Ghoſt being the moſt excellent of all bleſſings, as the Apoſtles did, ſo we likewiſe ought to make the greateſt preparation for it. For truly as the myſtery of this day was to perfect man's redemption, ſo we may boldly ſay, if we partake not in the bleſſings of it, all the work of man's redemption will be fruitleſs and wholly loſt on us.

For it is by the effect of this Holy Spirit we are to be confirmed in our faith, be patient under all troubles, humble when provoked, meek when injured, be peaceable with the contentious, be compaſſionate on the diſtreſſed, be never tired in doing any duty, or ſuffering whatever is our portion: It is by this Holy Mover we are to be directed in all we undertake, be wiſe in every choice, be helped in our devotion, be enflamed with the love of God, and ſupported in every obligation to ourſelves and our neighbour. So that whether in time of proſperity or adverſity, whether in ſpiritual

comforts or interior darkneſs, whether in time of temptation or peace, there is not in order to happineſs one ſtep we can take aright, but as directed and moved by this Holy Spirit. Theſe are ſome of its principal effects, neceſſary for our guidance to eternal life: And whoever is but ſo curious as to make obſervation of what paſſes within himſelf, how many ways we are apt to be deluded, both by fears and hopes, by the world, vanity and ſelf-love, how many dangers are about us, how uncertain we are in our choice, how little we know what is truly good for us, how eaſily dejected, how falſly comforted, how inſincere we are to ourſelves, how ignorant of our own ways, will ſoon conclude, that the aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt is, every hour of our lives, neceſſary for us; and that we cannot poſſibly go on with any degree of ſecurity, but with the help of this Guide, this Maſter, this Light, this Comforter, this Strengthener, the Holy Spirit of God.

This bleſſing we are to aſk at this time, and ſo aſk, that we may hope to obtain; ſince without it we muſt neceſſarily be miſerable; we are to aſk it for the whole year, for every action of it; nay, for our whole lives; men and

women, old and young; for whilſt we ſee the Holy Ghoſt came down not only on the Apoſtles, but on the whole congregation of both ſexes, to the number of an hundred and twenty perſons; we hence are taught, that as all ſtand in need of it, ſo all are capable of receiving it, and therefore all ought earneſtly to ſolicit for the obtaining it.

It is true, there being different degrees, in which we may partake of it, as one for the Apoſtles, another for the Diſciples, another for the good women and other believers; therefore ought every one to diſpoſe of himſelf to receive ſuch a proportion of it, as may be neceſſary for his ſtate. If he that is in a public employ, ſhould receive no more than a private perſon; if he that has the care of a family, ſhould partake only according to the meaſure of another that has no ſuch charge; if the religious, the Prieſt and Prelate, ſhould receive only equal with the layman; would not there be great failings in the adminiſtration of every reſpective duty: Whilſt that meaſure of grace being wanting, which is neceſſary for their charge, all is unavoidably expoſed to miſcarriages; and who muſt anſwer for the conſequences of them, but thoſe who through ſloth or

other faults, have neglected to obtain that large proportion of the Holy Spirit, which was indiſpenſably neceſſary for their conduct? Hence I cannot but with grief conſider the raſhneſs of many chriſtians, who with great induſtry are ſeeking employs of charge and truſt, or are in a way of being preferred to ſome order or dignity in the church, but at the ſame time reflect but little, whether they have that meaſure of grace neceſſary for ſuch an undertaking, and too often take but little care for the obtaining of it. If they have too evident experience already of their own weakneſs, and of the want of the Holy Spirit in a degree fit for an enployment of leſſer concern, is it reaſonable they ſhould take on them yet greater obligations, who have not been able to ſatisfy the leſs? There ſeems to be a certain order in grace, as well as nature; it is not perfected but by degrees; and there is ſcarce any one arrives to any ſort of eminency, but it is preceded with very evident marks of the firſt fruits of the Holy Spirit. If they have not ſcarce taſted of theſe, is it not a preſumption in them at once to expect an overflow of it? Truly I cannot but fear this forwardneſs of many, in engaging in things ſo much

above their ſtrength, and without ſuitable preparations of grace, opens a large gate for many diſorders, not only in church and ſtate, but likewiſe in all other undertakings of leſſer concern: For where ſucceſs depends, as it does every where, on the Divine Aſſiſtance; there muſt be miſcarriages, where human prudence is the director, and God left out. Let it be then the devotion of this holy time, earneſtly to implore the aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit, to go before us, and accompany us in all whatever we undertake; that he will be our guide, our comforter and ſtrength: And not only be ſo to us, but moſt particularly to all thoſe, who are recommended to places of dignity, on whoſe management depends the welfare of church or ſtate.

Whit-Sunday.

GOSPEL.

John xiv. 23. to the end.

THE Holy Ghoſt the Comforter, whom the Father ſends in my name, will teach you all things, and ſuggeſt all things to you, whatſoever I ſhall ſay to you. The Apoſtles were commanded to inſtruct all nations in the faith of Chriſt, and the Holy Ghoſt is here promiſed to be their maſter, to teach and ſuggeſt all things to them. In this is laid a ſure foundation of the chriſtian and catholic church, whilſt thoſe are appointed the paſtors of it, who are not only under a general protection of heaven, but have the ſolemn promiſe of the Son of God, the eternal truth, that they ſhall be taught all truth by the Spirit of God himſelf. And is not this a comfort to all believers, that while God exacts from them a faith of ſuch myſteries as are above their reaſon, he leaves them not to the uncertainty of their own judgments; but requires their ſubmiſſion to thoſe who are under the immediate guid-

ance of the Holy Ghoſt, and cannot be queſtioned, in what they teach, but by calling in queſtion the authority and truth of God himſelf? For what better ſecurity can man deſire, for the truth of what he is to believe, than the truth of God? God ſays, he will teach his Apoſtles, and theſe are to teach the world: And is not then every believer taught by God, when he is taught by thoſe whom God teaches? Is not his faith built on God, and on his truth? And is it not thus verified to the letter, what Chriſt ſaid to his Apoſtles; *Go and teach all nations; he that hears you, hears me; and he that deſpiſes you, deſpiſes me; and he that deſpiſes me, deſpiſes him that ſent me?* Thus in the foundation of the catholick church, the belief of this one article, *I believe in Jeſus Chriſt his only Son our Lord*, uſhered in all the reſt, whatever was taught by the Apoſtles: For believing Chriſt to be God, there was a neceſſity of giving credit to his promiſes, and of believing the Apoſtles in what they taught, whom he promiſed ſhould teach the truth. And none could except again their doctrine, but with violence to that article of their creed, ſince the queſtioning of his truth, involves a diſbelief of his being God.

In this manner then was the world taught to be chriſtian; and had it been our lot to have fallen in thoſe days, thus ſhould we have believed, and thus would our faith have been ſecured againſt all doubt. And was not this ſame method to continue to the end of the world? Thus Chriſt ſeems to teach, in commanding all to hear his church, in requiring all to believe it; in promiſing that his Holy Spirit ſhould abide with his Apoſtles to the end of the world, and lead them into all truth, and that the gates of hell ſhould not prevail againſt it. And who then can change this method? Who can lay any other foundation, beſides that which Chriſt has laid? Men may raiſe difficulties; but if they perſuade their hearers to diſtruſt in Chriſt's promiſes, and in his church thus eſtabliſhed, and to depend on the ſtrength of their own reaſoning, or of others like themſelves, in the expoſition of holy ſcripture; and by ſuch uncertain expoſitions to regulate their faith, and oppoſe the church in what ſhe teaches; is not this changing the method and ordinance of Chriſt, and bringing down faith from the ſecurity of God's Spirit to the weakneſs of human judgment, and to forſake God for man.

Is not this method of believing, ſo unlike the firſt inſtitution, enough to bring it into queſtion? The church now has been drawn down through the ſeries of many ages, from its firſt foundation by the Apoſtles, to our days, and is to continue to the end of the world; not a different, but the ſame church, in all ages; wherever it is, it muſt be the ſame now, as it was in the beginning. Let all then compare their preſent church with that of the Apoſtles; and as they compare other things, put both ends together. In the firſt inſtitution of the church, the Spirit of God was ordained guide of its paſtors, to lead them into all truth; the people were commanded to believe them, under pain of damnation; and in believing their paſtors, thus aſſiſted, had their faith reſting on the divine truth. Where the method of believing is the ſame now, there is ground enough of comfort, whilſt putting both ends together, there appears an agreement of the preſent age with the firſt inſtitution. But if, upon making this compariſon, there is now no acknowledged aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt in the paſtors (ſuch as Chriſt promiſed) to lead and ſecure them in the truth; if the people have no obligation of believing them, but are at the liberty of their own

judgments, to believe or diſſent, as ſhall ſeem agreeable to their private reaſon; let this method of believing, in this preſent age, be compared with the firſt age of it, when the Apoſtles inſtructed the world in chriſtianity, according to Chriſt's inſtitution, as it ſtands recorded in holy Scripture; and if they agree, there is no reaſon, on this head to queſtion it; but if it be wholly different, who can reſt ſatisfied in its being the ſame church which Chriſt founded, and was planted by the Apoſtles throughout the world? The church is the congregation of the faithful, or the flock united in faith; if the church now has not the ſame ſecurity in truth, which was given to it in the Apoſtles, with the promiſe of its continuance to the end of the world, it cannot be the church founded by the Apoſtles, but ſome other different from it; if the faith of the flock be not now founded on the ſame divine authority reſiding in its paſtors, as it was in the Apoſtles time, but it is left to the uncertain deciſions or expoſitions, either of paſtors or people, it cannot be that divine faith, in which the flock was united in the firſt inſtitution of the church. And who then can build their ſalvation on it, ſince that only being of Chriſt's appointment, this is

not of Chriſt, but a human inſtitution brought in upon what he did, and therefore is neither the church nor faith of Chriſt, or his Apoſtles; and how then can it be to ſalvation?

But what neceſſity was there of ſending the Holy Ghoſt upon the Apoſtles to teach them? Had not Chriſt himſelf taught them? It is true; but how little did they underſtand of what he taught? How imperfect yet was their faith? How weak were they, as to the profeſſion of what they underſtood and believed? The Holy Ghoſt therefore was ſent, to perfect what Chriſt had begun; by enlightening their underſtanding, by ſuggeſting to them what Chriſt had taught, by confirming their faith, by ſtrengthening them, ſo as to ſtand unmoved againſt all the terrors of cruelty and death. All this was neceſſary, that they might be enabled to ſatisfy that great charge, Chriſt had recommended to them. And hence may all chriſtians learn, how much it is their intereſt to open their hearts for the reception of this Holy Spirit, ſince without his help, all other gifts may be fruitleſs in them. How often do chriſtians know, without making any reflection upon what they know, and ſo loſe all the advantage of it? How often do they be-

lieve, and yet are ſo weak in faith, that it has no influence on the government of their lives? How often do they read and hear, and yet are inſenſible of the moſt important truths? How often are they ſenſible of the truth, and yet let it all be ſmothered by the force of intereſt, or other human reſpects.

If this be our common miſery in this mortal ſtate, have we not all reaſon enough to prepare our hearts, and ſolicit heaven this day for receiving the Holy Ghoſt; that, by his powerful influence, we may be ſecured againſt the dangers of our own weakneſs? That by his light our underſtandings may be opened, by his flames the fire of divine love may be kindled in our breaſts, by this new life our hearts may be ſtrengthened, ſo as to be proof againſt all attempts, and let no conſideration take place of duty. Theſe happy effects of the Holy Spirit we want every day of our lives, and it is for want of theſe, we take ſo many falſe ſteps, as if we had neither faith nor reaſon to direct us. Come then, O Holy Spirit, and take poſſeſſion of our hearts; quicken us with a new life, ſuch as may make us vigorous in all obligations of our ſtate, and put us wholly under the conduct of faith. Re-

move all obſtinacy from ſuch as call themſelves chriſtians, and make them ſenſible how they affront infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, when they have a diſtruſt of thee. On what can we depend, if we ſuppoſe that thou haſt failed us?

Monday in Whitſun-Week.

LESSON.

Acts x. 42. Ends verſe 48.

THEY heard them ſpeaking in divers tongues, and glorifying God. Amongſt the many wonderful effects of the *Holy Ghoſt*, the firſt and moſt remarkable was in the tongue. It was in this form he was pleaſed to deſcend; and deſcending thus, not only on the Apoſtles, but on the diſciples, on the women, and other believers, it proves, that the tongues of all the faithful of all ſtates, ought to be influenced and directed by the Holy Spirit. But in the firſt place, the Apoſtles ſpeak in different tongues, and all nations hear them in their own language. This being the day wherein the church was formed; it was but juſt, all tongues ſhould pay him homage, which were to be united in one faith and worſhip throughout the world: Tongues were firſt multiplied, to confound the pride of men, to divide the children of *Babylon*, and prevent the finiſhing their work: But now they are again

multiplied in the mouths of his Apoſtles, for a better end, to draw men to the faith, to the humility, and union of the body of Chriſt. The Apoſtles ſpeak in different tongues, and in theſe tell their ſucceſſors, they are to learn all languages, that ſo, like St. *Paul*, *They may become all to all*, in being able to give aſſiſtance to their flock, according to their different neceſſities. There is one ſort of language requiſite to reprehend the faulty, another to correct the inſolent, another to ſweeten the furious, another to encourage the dejected, another to ſoften the obſtinate, another to quicken the ſlothful: One for thoſe above us, another for equals, another for inferiors: One for the ſoft temper, another for the rough: One for the candid and ſincere, another for the flatterer, the pretender, or deſigner: One for the miſtaken or miſled, another for the ignorant, another for the affected and obſtinate. Thus are paſtors to ſpeak all languages, to be enabled to diſcharge their duty: It being for want of this ſkill they fail many times in very conſiderable parts of it; whilſt there needs no other reaſon for their being often diſappointed in the fruits of their endeavours, than their not ſuiting their diſcourſe, and ſpeaking the

language that is proper. Is it not often hence that a ſinner, inſtead of being reclaimed, is hardened; a quarrel, inſtead of being made up, is inflamed; a penitent, inſtead of being encouraged, is driven into deſpair; a ſeeker, inſtead of being helped, is put out of his way?

But how ſhall a paſtor become thus qualified? Who ſhall inſtruct him in this art of tongues? It can be none elſe but that Holy Spirit, with which the Apoſtles were at this time inſpired from above: He that taught them, is the only maſter for every paſtor: *Diſponet ſermones ſuos in judicio;* it is by him they are to be directed, not only what they are to ſay when brought before magiſtrates; but alſo in what manner to deliver themſelves, as the neceſſity of every one in particular ſhall require. With what care and ſolicitude then ought thoſe who are preparing for this ſtate, to endeavour to obtain a large portion of this Holy Spirit, who may ever aſſiſt them in the diſcharge of their great duty, and without whom they can do nothing well? How ought thoſe who have now this charge on them, when called to perform any part of their function, never to go about it, till they have firſt in heart or words, implored this

divine aſſiſtance, and ſincerely committed, whatever it be they undertake, to the conduct and management of the *Holy Ghoſt?* This is the only way to ſucceed, and the ſureſt means of ſatisfying themſelves, whether the truſting in their own ſtrength, has not been the occaſion of thoſe miſcarriages they may ſometimes meet with.

But are the paſtors only to be thus directed? No: The Holy Ghoſt deſcending on the multitude of believers, both women and men, in form of fiery tongues, ſhews the tongues of all ought to be directed by this Divine Spirit. All, in their different degrees and ſtate of life, are to contribute either to the planting or eſtabliſhing the goſpel in the hearts of others. The practice of the world, it is true, is not ſo; but worldly men moved by an ill ſpirit, propagate and maintain a carnal and worldly intereſt, contrary to that of God: This work has all thoſe for labourers to carry it on, who, by a practice of lying, detracting, curſing, ſwearing, or lewd diſcourſes, give authority and confidence to others to do the like: Who advance arguments to commend a life of idleneſs, of vanity, of eaſe and pleaſure, and by their converſation communicate ſuch prin-

ciples of liberty to others, which, like ill ſeed, ſhoot forth in time into all manner of irregularities. Theſe are chriſtians, who promote an intereſt contrary to Chriſt and his goſpel; who by word and example recommend the maxims of the world, and are very inſtrumental in enlarging a kingdom which is not God's. And why? Becauſe their tongues are infected with poiſon and corruption, which they induſtriouſly ſpread abroad; but are wholly unacquainted with God's Spirit, by whoſe power all theſe motions to evil ought to be carefully ſuppreſſed. But there are other ſelect chriſtians, who, ſenſible of the evils of the tongue, and having a juſt regard of their own and neighbour's eternal good, diligently obſerve all its motions; and ſeeing how ready it is to run into all manner of indiſcretion, raſhneſs, and extravagancies, and engage others in their ſins, never fail daily to invoke the Holy Spirit to direct and rule it; and foreſee no manner of diſcourſe, in which they are like to have a part, but, jealous of themſelves, they heartily recommend it to God, on whoſe Holy Spirit they depend. Thus, O God, are we entirely in thy hands; as we cannot think a good thought without thee, ſo neither without thee can we

we ſpeak aright. Help us, then, O God, our ſalvation, and ſend down thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, and by his powerful influence may we ever be directed in all we do or ſay: Correct the perverſe tongues of thoſe, whoſe diſcourſe is irreligion or prophaneneſs: Remove curſing and ſwearing from among thy people; and permit not lying, contention, biting, and detraction, any more to be the language of thoſe who pretend to follow thee: Heal all the evils of this unruly member, for it is only thy infinite power muſt do it.

Monday in Whitſun-Week.

GOSPEL.

John iii. 16. Ends verſe 21.

EVERY one who does ill, hates the light, and comes not to the light, that his works may not be reproved. True chriſtians are the children of light, the diſciples of truth; and being ſenſible how great a misfortune that darkneſs is to them, in which they are born, which is increaſed by ſin, and by every immoderate paſſion,

and by too great commerce with the world, are therefore induſtrious in all thoſe ways, by which God is pleaſed to communicate to them the light of heaven, and bring them to the knowledge of themſelves, and of the world, and of him. For this end, they are diligent in prayer, becauſe this opens their hearts to God; they are conſtant in reading the goſpel or other books of inſtruction, becauſe by this means Chriſt and his Spirit is manifeſted to them; they are accuſtomed to recollection, becauſe thus they enter more ſeriouſly into themſelves, and, by withdrawing at ſome diſtance from the world, are in the beſt circumſtances of ſeeing and making the trueſt judgment of it; they conſult directors, becauſe by ſuch conferences they more eaſily diſcover both the ſubtilties of pride and ſelf-love, and the ſnares of all their enemies; they are watchful againſt all manner of ſolicitude, and jealous of all pleaſing and afflicting paſſions, becauſe theſe are like dark clouds upon the ſoul, which ſmother good motions, and hinder it from diſcerning the ways of truth; they are eaſy in admitting the advice or reproof of friends, becauſe theſe often obſerve what cuſtom and partial ſelf-love permit them not to ſee in

themſelves; nay, the reproaches of enemies are welcome, becauſe theſe having nothing of that tenderneſs, which is a check upon friends, ſpeak freely thoſe truths which others conceal: But above all, they are importune with heaven, for ſending into their hearts that Holy Spirit, which came at this time upon the Apoſtles, that by the direction of his Divine Light, they may diſcern every where the ways and will of God, and learn to diſtinguiſh betwixt inclination, cuſtom, education, example and duty.

Here is their great dependence, becauſe they know, all other helps will be fruitleſs in them, if this Divine Mover undertakes not to be their guide; therefore they pray, not only now, but every day, that his light may ever accompany them in all they do, and prevent all thoſe deluſions, to which they are always expoſed, through the many preſſing evils, that are within and about them.

This is the conſtant method of good chriſtians; their hopes ſpur them on to come to the poſſeſſion of Light eternal; and knowing there is no poſſibility of effecting it, but by the communication of the ſame Light diffuſing itſelf into the hearts of the faithful; therefore in this

is centered their deſires, prayers, labours, that they may happily at length paſs through the difficult, dangerous, dark and confuſed ways of this pilgrimage, and arrive ſafe at that end, which, concluding their troubles, will be the beginning of that ſtate of perfect light which knows no darkneſs.

The way of ſinful chriſtians is contrary to this; their great misfortune is not ſo much in being ſinners, as in hating that Light which ſhews them their unhappineſs, and the means of being delivered from it. By theſe degrees their blindneſs grows upon them: Their paſſion firſt makes them give the darkneſs of ſin, preference to the light of juſtice and truth: The love of ſin renders truth diſagreeable; and their accompliſhment in evil, is to keep at a diſtance from it, to ſuppreſs, ſtifle and perſecute it, as their danger, and as likely to prove injurious to them.

There are few, it may be, that by a poſitive act, expreſs their hatred of light or truth; but they are many, who, in the method they take, betray this averſion. For when chriſtians are ſo far engaged in any diſorder, that they are unwilling to read what is for their inſtruction, are afraid of ſeeing thoſe perſons, whom they

know zealous for reclaiming them; cannot bear a reproof, but with expreſſions of diſlike againſt ſuch as attempt this charity; when they grow fond of ſuch books, entertainments, and company as they know ſuitable to their own perverſe ways; and if they keep up yet a form of religion, ſeek out ſuch for the pretended government of their conſcience, as being either altogether ſtrangers, cannot ſuſpect the depth of their iniquity; or being weak, or unexperienced are likely to be favourable, upon the ſuppoſition of their ſincerity; when they are come, I ſay, to this ſtate, do not they in all theſe ſeveral ways, ſhew their averſion to light and truth, by purpoſely declining all thoſe helps, by which theſe can poſſibly touch upon them? It is but too evident, and their condition muſt be here ſet down as moſt deplorable, even as that which is marked by Chriſt with the worſt of characters.

If this be ſo, muſt not all thoſe chriſtians hence take the alarm, who, though not blinded by vice, yet over-ruled by a prevailing ſloth or indifferency of mind, have no ſort of ſolicitude for coming to a ſenſe of their duty, will take no pains in reading, praying, or conſulting about the affairs of their ſouls, but letting all go

on by hazard, are not concerned in making proviſion for their eternal ſtate? If theſe hate not the light, can they ſay they love it? If they loved it, would not they endeavour to approach to it, that what is good in them might be approved, what is evil, be condemned, and what is defective, be perfected? Thoſe who ſeek God, and deſire to do nothing but in his ſpirit, never think they can know too much of his law, and of the ſanctity of his ways: And where there is little or none of this induſtry, can ſuch chriſtians perſuade themſelves, that they ſeek God? They ſeek him not, at leaſt, as they ought to do; they ſeek him not as their eternal good, and how then will they ever find him ſo? O God, how much reaſon have we to deplore their blindneſs, who, living engaged in ſin, love darkneſs more than light; and, for the preſent ſatisfaction of their paſſions, renounce thee, and in thee, all hopes of happineſs! How much reaſon have we to lament our general injuſtice, in being bent with ſo much earneſtneſs on the things of this world, and ſo ſlothful in ſeeking thee! Remedy theſe evils we beſeech thee, by taking from ſinners the love of their darkneſs, and inſpiring them with a deſire of light. Pour forth thy

Holy Spirit into the hearts of all thy faithful, that being quickened with this heavenly fire, they may be more zealous in the obſervance of thy law, and learn to raiſe up their deſires above the things of this world, and proportion theſe deſires to the value of that happineſs, which is the object of their hopes.

Tueſday in Whitſun-Week.

LESSON.

Acts viii. 14. Ends verſe 17.

THE Holy Ghoſt had not deſcended on any of them (of Samaria) *but they had only been baptized in the name of our Lord.* Thoſe who are baptized, are obliged to profeſs the faith of Chriſt, and live as his children: But becauſe the duties of a chriſtian, in doing good, and avoiding evil, are very great, and require an inward ſtrength and vigour of mind for their juſt performance; therefore it is neceſſary, that grace received in baptiſm, whereby we are made the children of God, ſhould be perfected, and improved

by the *Holy Ghoſt*; by whoſe inviſible reſidence within us we may be ſanctified into his temples, and be ſo enabled by that ſpirit of power and ſtrength, as, of children in chriſtianity, to become perfect men, and be fitted for every duty that belongs to a ſoldier of Chriſt. For it is to the quality of his ſoldiers we are engaged in the ſacrament of confirmation: It is the obligation of this profeſſion we ought to renew at this holy time; repreſenting with ſorrow, to Almighty God, all our paſt weakneſſes and want of reſolution in aſſerting his cauſe; imploring freſh ſupplies of his grace for the recovery of what ground has been loſt, and offering ourſelves now to whatever difficulties or pains ſhall be neceſſary for the maintaining the intereſt of his honour or laws. This ought to be a great part of our buſineſs in this preſent ſolemnity; it being truly the want of this grace, that makes us ſo often falſe to our cauſe, faithleſs to our Lord, and expoſe ourſelves to thoſe miſcarriages, which, if not prevented, will one day be followed with our ruin. It is cowardice, fear, or ſhame, that are the general occaſion of our daily ſins, whilſt to the importunity of an enemy, and not his force, we eaſily yield; whilſt a little uneaſineſs ſhews how very little

our patience is; whilſt our human reſpects and compliance prevail on us to be deſerters, and take part with the world or devil, againſt whom we have liſted ourſelves under Chriſt's ſtandard.

Reflect but on the failings of one day: Why is it, that a haſty word, a ſmall reproof, a reflection, the being contradicted, and generally ſuch inconſiderable provocations, ſo eaſily raiſe a diſturbance and paſſion amongſt chriſtians? Is there not a ſtrange cowardice in this, that profeſſing themſelves Chriſt's ſoldiers, they can bear ſo very little for his ſake; but on ſuch trivial occaſions are drawn from their duty, and by growing angry and paſſionate, rebel againſt his commands? If there were but a ſpark of that true courage, ſuch as is inſpired by the *Holy Ghoſt*, a chriſtian heart would paſs by all ſuch provocations unmoved, and not loſe his ground for ſuch weak attempts, what a kind of a ſoldier is he, who upon the leaſt noiſe or diſturbance, quits his poſt? This it is thou doſt, who art a pretender to the chriſtian warfare, who having undertaken to ſtand all aſſaults under the covert of patience, humility and meekneſs, and thus fight the battles of Chriſt; upon every alarm, throweſt away thy arms, and puſhed on, not with God's

Spirit, but with pride, obſtinacy and contention, fighteſt now, not his, but thy own cauſe with the arms of the fleſh, of animoſity and choler.

Why is it again, chriſtians ſo eaſily yield to the ſolicitation of the ſenſes, of corrupt nature, or company? It is plain, the profeſſion made in baptiſm, obliges us to renounce all theſe; and by the engagements made in confirmation, we are bound with conſtancy and courage, to withſtand their aſſaults, and what is the yielding to them, as often as we do it, but a great effect of cowardice, of ſome fear or ſhame, as not holding out under the uneaſineſs of a temptation, and being unwilling to bear the conflict with our corrupt inclinations? Suffering with patience, is the duty we have undertaken; and we never yield to ſin, but becauſe we will not ſuffer the trouble of reſiſting it. So that we may generally ſet this down for the occaſion of our offences; that we are unwilling to bear the uneaſineſs, and take the pains neceſſary for preſerving ourſelves innocent. There is an uneaſineſs in denying the eyes their ſatisfaction; there is a trouble in ſtanding out againſt the inclination of the other ſenſes and the appetite; it is difficult to be ſilent un-

der the itch of ſpeaking; it is hard to avoid the occaſions of vanity; there is a great ſtruggle neceſſary, not to be led along with the mode; and even a violence requiſite to break company, and not be ſeduced by it; to overcome an ill habit, cannot be done without many a battle; the ordinary temptations of life cannot be maſtered but by conſtancy and diligence; nor any chriſtian duty, whether as to prayer or ſacraments, be well performed, but by laborious endeavours and vigilancy. So that a chriſtian, who will not take pains, who will not ſuffer many an uneaſineſs with peace and patience, who will not, like a reſolute ſoldier, ſtand out againſt every aſſault that is made againſt him, and fight at every turn, as often as he meets his enemy, and thus perſevere to the end, muſt neceſſarily be overcome by the fleſh or the world, and be made a prey to his adverſary. And to what can his ruin at laſt be charged, but his cowardice, his fear, his ſloth; as being either ſurpriſed by his enemy for want of watching and being on duty; or elſe tamely ſurrendering himſelf, becauſe he will not ſuffer the inconvenience of a neceſſary oppoſition? Thus he makes up but very ill accounts, whilſt to ſpare himſelf the pains

of resisting sin, he chuses to expose himself to the punishment of it; and to avoid a temporal trouble, embraces eternal torments.

Thus, O God, we must here lay before thee the root of all our evils, whilst undertaking to be thy soldiers, we soon forget our obligation, and chuse rather to yield than to fight; we let every thing master us, and yet promise nothing shall do it: Help us, O God, in this our weakness; and thou, O *Holy Ghost* inspire this day our hearts with new courage; give us strength to resist all evil, constancy to undergo all troubles, and let us never be over-ruled by any other fear or shame, but that of offending thee. Pardon me all my past infidelity and treachery, and let me once more be listed to fight under thy standard; stand by me in all dangers, go before me in all difficulties, and now give me grace to persevere to the end.

Tueſday in Whitſun-Week.

GOSPEL.

John x. 1. Ends verſe 10.

I Am the door; if any one enters by me, he ſhall be ſaved. In this Goſpel Chriſt gives the character of good and evil paſtors, and it is made choice of at this time by the church, to excite the faithful to pray for all thoſe, who, in this ſolemnity, are admitted to holy orders. For it being here poſitively declared, that ſuch as are unduly preſented, are not paſtors, but thieves and murderers, even the murderers of ſouls, has not the flock reaſon to addreſs themſelves to God, in the fervour of prayer and penance, for preventing this miſchief? It is upon the apprehenſion of this danger, the church ordains the faithful, at this time, to join in faſting and prayer, for the obtaining of God good ſhepherds, and to defend them from ſuch, who, under the ſhepherds habit, will prove no better than wolves. Thoſe only are good, who enter by Chriſt, who is the door into the fold; that is, who are called

by the Spirit of God, upon motives which regard his glory, which bind them to the good of the church, to the ſalvation of ſouls, which oblige them to do the will of God, and to make a ſacrifice of themſelves to his ſervice, and of the leaſt of his flock. Secondly, who labour in the inſtruction of thoſe under their charge, and make them hear their voice. Thirdly, who take care to know their ſheep, to know their diſpoſitions and neceſſities, to ſtudy the will of God in their regard, to viſit them in their wants, and be ever ready to aſſiſt them in particular. Fourthly, who are watchful over their own flock, without affecting to raiſe a confidence in them, with whom they are not charged. Fifthly, who are laborious in drawing ſouls from ſin, from their evil habits, from the corruptions of the world, and pomps of the devil, and to lead them in the ways of the goſpel. Sixthly, who not only teach them this way, but ſtand at the head of their flock, doing what they teach, and giving life to their doctrine by example.

Theſe are ſome marks of good ſhepherds expreſsly mentioned by Chriſt himſelf in this goſpel: Wherever they are found, there is reaſon to hope, ſuch have entered by Chriſt, and are in the way to his promiſes

But when ambition and intereſt, the deſire of eaſe, the conveniencies of life, the advancing a family, *&c.* are the motives that carry to the temple, what way can they find into it, but that of robbers; ſince this is not to enter by Jeſus Chriſt, but by the world, and with hopes of finding the world in it? And wherever ſuch diſpoſitions appear, as the love of eaſe, a graſping after the world, a fondneſs of its ways and liberties; I cannot but fear, that ſuch, having not the Spirit of Chriſt, are no ſhepherds of his flock, but rather murderers of it, in the neglect of ſouls, and the ill example given, in teaching them to be more in love with the world than with God.

If theſe characters are ſome direction for paſtors, they are likewiſe for the flock. The chriſtian that enters not by Jeſus Chriſt, is none of his fold. They who upon motives of temporal intereſt embrace his faith, enter not by Jeſus Chriſt. They, who, profeſſing it, let cuſtom, or the deſire of being eſteemed pious, put them upon the practice of religious duties, ſeek not entrance by Jeſus Chriſt. They who depend with ſuch exceſs of confidence on ſome directors, as to think virtue to be inſeparable from their direction, ſeek not

entrance by Jeſus Chriſt. They, who ſo depend on the recital of ſome particular prayers, or wearing a habit, as to have aſſurance of ſalvation on this account, without any concern for reforming the diſorders of their lives, ſeek not entrance by Jeſus Chriſt. They, who place their confidence of ſalvation, or of the means of obtaining it on any thing created, whether on earth, or in heaven, ſo as to take them from their dependence on Jeſus Chriſt, and the virtue of his paſſion, ſeek not entrance by Jeſus Chriſt.

The reaſon of all is, becauſe Jeſus Chriſt is the door, by which all muſt enter, none can be ſaved, but by him; he is the door both of grace and glory, of ſalvation, and of all the means of obtaining it. All good is in him, and muſt come to us by him: All good is in him, as in a treaſure, and muſt come to us by the virtue of his merits, becauſe his blood is the price of our ſin, and nothing can prevail with God, but as united with his paſſion. Nothing then can be done in order to ſalvation, but with an entire dependence on the divine grace, to be obtained by us through the merits of Chriſt; the moſt religious duties, without this dependence, muſt be fruitleſs; and ſeek-

ing heaven any other way, which is not by Chriſt, will never find it, becauſe it is not entering by him.

And this being the firſt principle of chriſtianity, what muſt be thought of all thoſe chriſtians, who ſeem to live in hopes of heaven yet are little ſolicitous to live according to thoſe rules which Chriſt has given us; who deſpiſing the humility of the goſpel, have no comfort but in the pomps of the devil, and the world; who neglecting the ways of penance, ſtudy nothing but eaſe and inclination; who not valuing the ſpirit of charity and peace, live in continual diſſentions; who being blind to the duties of juſtice, ſee nothing but their preſent intereſt, and advance this by the conſtant practice of frauds and oppreſſion; who not regarding the moderation preſcribed, give themſelves up to a univerſal prodigality, gluttony, and intemperance; who not being watchful over their paſſions, ſacrifice life and eſtate in their ſupport; who paſſing by the narrow way, open their ſouls to all the unwarrantable diſpenſations of a corrupt world and cuſtom, and inſtead of ſeeking, before all things, the kingdom of God, and its juſtice, are bent with eagerneſs on every thing elſe, and put this to the hazard

of a ſlothful and idle life: This is the torrent in which are carried the greateſt part of the chriſtian world, and yet all live in hopes of heaven. And by whom are they to enter? Can they expect to enter by Chriſt, when they forſake the ways of Chriſt? Can their confidence be in him, when they have ſo little regard to what he preſcribes, that their whole lives are a contradiction to his goſpel? It is but too evident then, whatever hopes they have, they are not hopes in him; and if by him all are to enter, who are to be ſaved, what will their ſalvation be, who ſeek not to enter by him?

O God, how afflicting is this proſpect of a believing, and yet unhappy world, which having heaven before them, and pretending to go to it, are not ſolicitous to enter by him, whom they know to be the door; but purſuing their own evil ways, carry on their hopes, even while they act againſt him, who is the only ground of all hope? O God, behold, I enter here a proteſtation againſt this fatal abſurdity, and beſeech thee ſo to direct me by thy grace, that I may put my whole confidence in Chriſt, and the merits of his paſſion, and have no dependence but what centers in him. And while I truſt in him, O God, let my life be directed by him.

Ember Wedneſday in Whitſun-Week.

LESSON.

Acts ii. 14. Ends verſe 21.

I Will pour forth my ſpirit upon them. It is ſomething extraordinary, that in this great ſolemnity of joy and thankſgiving, the church ſhould oblige all her children to humiliation and penance: But the reaſon is, becauſe in this week, Biſhops give holy orders, ordaining prieſts and deacons, and other miniſters of the church; and being ſenſible how abſolutely neceſſary the Holy Ghoſt is for them, in the diſcharge of their function; therefore ſhe ſummons all the faithful to make their addreſſes to God in their behalf, in faſting and prayer, that ſo this Spirit may be abundantly poured forth upon them, and they be thus made worthy miniſters of God's church. Now this ſummons ought to be faithfully performed by all people, inaſmuch as this is a great concern of the whole body, of which they are members. A good paſtor helps to build up and ſup-

port Chriſt's church; but an ill one, as much as in him lies, overthrows and pulls it down; he neglects thoſe who are within the fold, and by his diſorders makes thoſe blaſpheme who are without; he betrays the cauſe he undertakes, and either ſtarves or poiſons thoſe he is obliged to feed; hence ſuch a paſtor is one of the ſevereſt judgments God can ſend to a flock; and though he be a certain puniſhment of all ſins, yet he may more juſtly fall to their ſhare, who on theſe days, when the church obliges, never concern themſelves in imploring the aſſiſtance of God's Spirit for ſuch as are preſented for this charge, but are ſeeking prophanely their own ſatisfaction, when they ſhould be making their application to God in the ſpirit of humility for this publick good, are wholly unconcerned, when the moſt important concern of the church is in hand, ſuch as requires the concurrence of all, as being for the good of all. Truly, if they did but reflect how much the church ſuffers from the ſcandal of ill paſtors, and from the neglect of ſlothful ones, it were to be hoped, none of its members would fail of uniting with her in their addreſſes to God, for the preventing ſuch miſchiefs for the future: And if they did but conſider how

much every particular flock ſuffers, that is under the conduct of an unqualified paſtor, either from his unſeaſonable ſilence, or his indiſcreet advice, or his undue adminiſtration of the ſacraments, or his favouring, if not encouraging them in the diſorderly method of their lives, with other miſchievous effects, I think it might be a ſufficient encouragement to theſe days devotion; that ſo, if the church cannot be wholly freed from this ſpiritual contagion, they at leaſt may be ſecured againſt it, and have no part in the evil.

How ought we all then to pray this day, that none may be promoted to holy orders, but ſuch as are called by God, and prepared by his ſpecial grace, to be fit miniſters in his church: That none may be preſented, who have their eye upon preferment, upon worldly intereſt, titles, reſpect, or the hopes of an eaſy life, who thus make heaven ſtoop to the earth, and even in ſome manner proſtitute the Holy Ghoſt to ſerve their baſe and worldly ends, and thus engage themſelves in a ſtate of life, where the number and weight of their ſins daily increaſe, in proportion to the greatneſs of the miniſtry, which they daily abuſe? Ought we not again to extend our prayers this day, that

God, by his infinite grace, would prevent thoſe many abuſes committed in the church, by thoſe who have the privilege of preſenting to benefices; who being entruſted, like common fathers, faithfully to provide the flock, according to the beſt of their care, with ſuch as, upon juſt enquiry, they judge beſt qualified for that great charge, quite forget their truſt, and inſtead of providing for the flock, make it their whole concern to provide for themſelves, expoſing the charge to ſale, and preſenting him who will give the moſt money for it? And where conſcience will not allow of this traffic, yet is there not ſtill variety of abuſes, ſince the only motive of preſenting one to fill a vacancy, being the qualifications for the juſt performance of the duty; the leaſt regard is generally had to this, and that which determines the choice, is the conſideration of ſome convenience, friendſhip, family, or the deſire of obliging ſome perſon, whoſe favour may be ſerviceable? And thus while church benefices are beſtowed on the conſideration of theſe worldly goods, it comes to be little leſs than a palliated ſale; whilſt the giving ſuch employments on the motive of temporal things, though it has not the form, yet, in effect, it is

nothing but ſelling them. And though ſometimes it may not be in the patron's power to preſent one, whom he judges truly proper for the flock; yet is he not bound to come as near it as he can? What if he cannot do the beſt, will this juſtify his trading for what in itſelf is holy? Why ſhall he put it, for intereſt ſake, into ſuch hands who deſign nothing but to make it mercenary? And if thus purchaſed, by an ill miniſter's neglect, and bad example, vice and wickedneſs ſhould ſpread amongſt the flock, Who ſhall anſwer for this corruption of the people? He that comes as near his duty as circumſtances will permit, can ſay, *Servavi animam meam:* But to venture the people being heathens, becauſe he cannot make them the beſt chriſtians, is what no one ought to do in his family, and why then in his pariſh? And to put a wolf over the flock, becauſe he cannot have the beſt ſhepherd, is what none will do with his ſheep: And why then with his people? God is certainly diſhonoured with vice, and therefore it muſt be a duty for every chriſtian in their reſpective places, to ſee virtue as much encouraged and promoted as they can. Let it then be the principal ſubject of our prayers this day, to beſeech Almighty

God to deliver his church from all abuſes of this kind; that none may be preſented to holy orders or benefices, but thoſe whoſe virtue and zeal ſhew they are choſen by him: Thus let us pray in private, thus in the public liturgy, in our *memento's*, *&c.* that ſo the remedy may be as extenſive as the miſchief.

End of the Firſt Volume.

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